

GEM STATE **Producer**

Idaho Farm Bureau

November 2020 • Volume 24 Issue 7

National Gallup Poll: Ag #1 Industry In 2020



**Cash the
farm dog, 4**

**New wheat
building, 8**

**Idaho No. 1
in barley, 33**

Second COVID relief package will help more farmers



On Sept. 17, President Trump and Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue announced a second round of direct aid to farmers and ranchers through the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program.

Up to \$14 billion will be used to help farmers who continue to suffer from depressed markets due to the pandemic. Farm Bureau greatly appreciates this lifeline to help more farmers and ranchers stay afloat and survive the economic impacts of COVID-19.

The first round of CFAP aid to farmers and

ranchers covered sales, or losses, through April 15. Of course, we know that COVID-19 didn't disappear on that date.

In fact, case numbers and economic impacts worsened over the summer in some areas that were not as hard hit in the earlier days of the pandemic. That rolling wave has lengthened the economic toll, and many farmers are just now getting a handle on how their operations have been affected.

Then there's the matter of CFAP aiding

See **DUVALL**, page 6

The President's Desk

By Bryan Searle

President Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Agriculture persevered in 2020, and America took notice



As the 2020 harvest continues to wind down and the cattle are brought off the range, all I can say is, "Wow what a year 2020 has been thus far."

The year began with good prices for most agricultural products produced in Idaho but that changed abruptly when the pandemic hit. This led to uncertainty for farmers and ranchers as to what crops should be planted and what markets would look like.

But farmers and ranchers in their wisdom made decisions and forged forward and the crops

of 2020 for the most part have seen good quality and yields.

Although some consumers who don't understand how food and fiber is produced may be critical of agriculture, I would ask, has the pandemic helped change their attitude?

Well, consider this year's results from a special national Gallup poll that is conducted annually.

Americans across the country who like to eat — I would assume that includes everyone — obviously noticed and appreciated that the

See **SEARLE**, page 7

Inside Farm Bureau

By Zak Miller

CEO Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Patience wins if you find yourself 'stuck' behind a herd



It is fine and dandy for all of us to talk about the need to "just slow down" in life and "enjoy the ride." I am confident that when we make such statements, we fully mean it and intend to live by our beliefs and statements. If only life worked out this way.

Many of the backroads and highways are also stock driveways, which pretty much is just what it sounds like. There are times the road is flooded with cows or sheep.

Many of our current paved roads began as livestock trails. Stockmen and women trail their stock

to and from the high country each spring and fall, chasing green grass or bringing the year's crop home for the season.

Livestock travel at a slower pace than vehicles, and thus if someone were to come into contact with a herd on a road the options are to slow down or slow down. Trying to alter the pace of a herd of animals without the consent and assistance of those herding the animals will only lead to frustration on the driver's part and perhaps a reprimand from those trying to care for the stock.

See **MILLER**, page 6



Idaho Farm Bureau.

Volume 24, Issue 7

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COVER: Wine grapes are harvested in a vineyard near Caldwell in October. See page 18 for a story about agriculture ranking as the most trusted industry in a national Gallup poll. (Photo by Sean Ellis)



Photo by Sean Ellis

Potatoes are harvested in a field near Shelley. The total value of agricultural production in Idaho increased 6 percent last year compared with 2018.

Value of Idaho ag production increases again

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO — After declining in 2015 and 2016, the total value of agricultural production in Idaho has increased for three straight years.

According to USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service, the total value of Idaho's ag production in 2019 was \$8.25 billion, a 6 percent increase compared with 2018's \$7.75 billion total.

The total value of crop production in Idaho was \$3.45 billion in 2019, up 4 percent over 2018, and the total value of livestock production in Idaho was \$4.8 billion, up 9 percent.

Milk remained the state's top farm commodity last year in terms of total value of production, at \$2.86 billion, a 20 percent increase compared with 2018. That was the second highest value of milk production ever in the state, behind only the \$3.2 billion total recorded in 2014.

Part of the reason for the significant rise in the value of milk production in Idaho last year was an increase in total volume, while the other reason was a marked increase in the milk prices that Idaho dairy operations received last year.

See PRODUCTION, page 32



Cash, a 7-year-old Australian shepherd, works with cattle on the K—J Ranch in Payette.

Photos by Sean Ellis

Right-hand **D**OG

Local farm dog competes in Dog of the Year Contest

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

PAYETTE — Cash is a well-trained farm dog who excels in trialing competitions and was a finalist in the 2021 American Farm Bureau Dog of the Year Contest.

But where he really shines is in his day-to-day work on the K—J Ranch in Payette.

“I use Cash every day to run our operation and could not do it without him,” says K—J owner Carol Gerken.

Cash, a 7-year-old Australian shepherd, was one of the finalists in the AFBF contest, which celebrates farm dogs that work

alongside farmers and ranchers.

When Gerken’s husband passed away unexpectedly in February 2018, she had to learn to manage her farming operation by herself and “find a way to create enough income to pay the bills and allow me to stay on the (15-acre) farm I call home.”

To do that, she developed a program that trains other ranchers and farmers to train and use dogs for low-stress livestock handling on their farms and ranches.

She also raises and trains stock to be used for hosting stock dog trials, and implemented a pasture rotation program for raising stock.

Cash, who weighs 48 pounds, helps Gerken sort, move and manage cattle, goats and sheep on a daily basis and get them set up for various lessons.

The K—J Ranch also has ducks, horses and geese and, yes, Cash can herd geese.

Cash, who is red merle in color, is an integral part of the ranch’s daily operations.

“Cash is my right-hand man in this venture,” Gerken says. “I honestly could not continue living on the farm and carry out this venture without his help.”

A lot of dogs are well-trained to work on the farm or ranch but what sets Cash apart is his instinct, Gerken says.

“He is very keen, very instinctive,” she says. “In other words, I don’t have to tell him to get a cow that’s getting away, he just goes and gets it.”

“He is a very confident dog ... and he really shines in everyday work,” she adds.

Brian Abingdon, a professional dog trainer who lives near Eugene, Ore., trained Cash as a puppy and says the dog is about as tough and smart as they come.

Some Australian shepherd farm dogs take years to achieve the title of working trials champion, the highest achievement an Australian shepherd can attain. Some never attain that title.

“Cash did it in half a dozen weekends. It was rather remarkable,” Abingdon said. “He is a dirty tough dog and there is practically nothing he can’t do. He’s legit.”

Abingdon said although he helped train Cash, “He’s Carol’s dog. She made him. I just kind of got a start on him. He is the epitome of a farm day. He is her everyday dog.”

AFBF received 90 nominations for its 2021 Farm Dog of the Year contest. The winner, who will be announced in January, will receive \$5,000 in prize money and a year’s worth of dog food from Purina, which sponsors the annual contest. Up to four regional runners-up will each receive \$1,000 in prize money.

According to the guidelines for the AFBF contest, desired attributes of Farm Dog of the Year entries include helpfulness to the farmer, obedience and playfulness.

Farm dog owners must be Farm Bureau members to enter their dogs in the contest.

Cash did not win this year’s contest but Gerken says as far as she’s concerned, he more than earns his keep around the K—J Ranch and is the top dog in her mind.

“Cash is the poster child for farm dogs everywhere,” she says.

He is also fiercely loyal, one of the top traits of Australian shepherds, she adds.

“Australian shepherds are very loyal; that’s why I like them,” she says. “They are very nice and they are friendly but if you were to come up to me and be threatening, you would wear Cash and not in a nice way.” ■



Cash takes a well-deserved break at the K—J Ranch in Payette.

LEFT: Carol Gerken poses with her dog Cash. Cash was a finalist in the 2021 American Farm Bureau Dog of the Year Contest.

DUVALL

Continued from page 2

producers who never participated in farm programs before—producers who may not have realized that aid was available. The situation was further complicated as commodities were added to the CFAP program over time.

Producers who saw that their commodities weren't covered in the initial package might not have realized it changed and they should apply.

One of the first impacts of the pandemic was concern about food supplies. While the temporarily empty shelves were more a result of changes in consumers' buying habits and processing bottlenecks, we all know that keeping farmers and ranchers in production is a key to ensuring we all have access to the foods we need.

The term “safety net” is often used in the context of farm programs, but I believe CFAP is as much a safety net for consumers and American food security as it is for agricultural producers.

Finally, the coronavirus pandemic hit at a time when many farmers and ranchers were continuing to struggle with low prices due to reduced exports.

You know, after several years of low prices, back-to-back weather disasters, trade disruptions and, now, a global pandemic, I'm sure many farmers and ranchers are starting to feel a little like Job, whose faith was tested.

But just as Job never lost his faith in God, farmers and ranchers will not lose their devotion to farming and feeding our nation.

And thanks to the assistance provided to help them survive the eco-

nomics impacts of the pandemic, more farmers and ranchers will survive to see our markets not only restored, but increased.

Another phrase we often use in agriculture is that farmers would rather get their income from the market than the government. That remains true. We're all looking forward to the time when markets recover, trade returns to its pre-trade war levels, and commodity prices increase.

We also pray for an end to this pandemic and its devastating impact on many people's lives and livelihoods.

Like Job, farmers and ranchers have been both blessed and tested. But we know the future of agriculture is bright.

We'll be here, #StillFarming, and continuing to feed, fuel and clothe the world. ■

MILLER

Continued from page 2

The better solution is to take the opportunity to see deeper into the process of trailing animals; there is always more than meets the eye.

What can one learn from watching animals trail and the humans who encourage the process?

Teamwork is not exclusive to sports, and good teamwork on a trail is almost poetry in motion. What may appear at first glance to be cowboys randomly changing position is real teamwork.

For example, suppose one rider is on a skittish colt. In that case, you may see a seasoned horse and rider come closer to the colt to compensate for the lack of experience.

Anticipation

Often, on a drive, friends and family may help and enjoy the experience. It's a good thing, too, because it is rare to see more riders than animals. The herd always has the numbers on its side.

A difference between helpers and

those that live with the herd and know the trail is that the herders will start to move early to compensate for the “snares” in the trail to keep them as minimal as possible.

A herd of animals is a group of living, reacting animals, and good stockmen adapt. The trail may not change, but the temperature, weather, smells, traffic, noises, etc., are ever-changing, as well as a herd's behavior.

Cows that have been harassed by ATVs, wolves, bears, you name it, will travel much differently than those that have been blissfully alone all summer. A good stockmen's job is to adapt to the herd's attitude.

A common term for doing this is “pressure” and sometimes a great deal of pressure is needed. Other times, little to none should be applied. The trick is not to predetermine what is needed but let the situation dictate the needs.

Patience wins

If a vehicle meets a herd head-on, the prudent decision should be to stop the

vehicle and let the animals walk past. What a great experience to see a group of animals traveling as a herd. It truly is a unique, up-close experience.

Sure, a driver can push through honking and yelling to speed the process. The animals can also dent the car, the cowboys can scowl and cuss you, and you will get through the herd maybe 10 seconds quicker. It's not worth it.

Suppose you find yourself approaching the rear of the herd. In that case, you will need help. Typically, our Western culture is friendly and accommodating to our neighbors. With few exceptions, a group of cowboys is more than happy to assist.

If you hold on to your patience, you can see in action the concepts discussed above of teamwork and anticipation.

Patience will pay off – and in no time – the herd will be off the road, or a good cowboy will part the herd for you to pass through. In either instance, what an excellent opportunity to be taught such life lessons on the range while enjoying the beauty of our great state's backcountry. ■

‘Well, as scary as bare shelves are, imagine how terrifying it would be to see bare farm fields. That did not happen because American farmers and ranchers are very good at plowing ahead despite difficult challenges.’

SEARLE

Continued from page 2

nation’s farmers and ranchers kept plowing ahead with their usual food-production plans despite the significant uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 outbreak, as evidenced by the results of the recent poll.

Americans easily rated farming and agriculture as the industry they feel most positive about, when asked if they feel very positive, somewhat positive, neutral, somewhat negative or very negative about certain industries.

That’s the first time the ag industry has ranked No. 1 in the 20-year history of the poll, which was conducted July 30-Aug. 12 and released Sept. 8.

See page 18 for a story on the poll results.

The poll showed that 69 percent of Americans had a total positive feeling toward agriculture.

In fact, farming and agriculture enjoyed an 11-point increase in the poll compared to the same poll conducted last year during the same time period.

It seems very obvious that agriculture’s perseverance through the COVID-19 outbreak played a major role in Americans’ overall feeling toward the industry.

Remember early during the COVID-related shutdowns when runs on certain products resulted in some bare grocery store shelves and a short-lived food scare?

Well, as scary as bare shelves are, imagine how terrifying it would be to see bare farm fields. That did not happen because American farmers and ranchers are very good at plowing ahead despite difficult challenges.

Every year, producers roll the dice to a certain extent because they are somewhat at the mercy of markets, the weather and crop diseases and pests, as well a host of other challenges.

American Farm Bureau Federation, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation and other state Farm Bureaus made a concerted effort to let people know that the nation’s agriculture industry would once again produce an abundant, affordable and safe food supply, COVID or no COVID.

American Farm Bureau Federation’s #StillFarming social media campaign was viewed by millions of people thanks to efforts by AFBF and state Farm Bureaus.

It would appear from the results of the Gallup poll that Americans got the message and greatly appreciated farmers and ranchers for continuing to produce the food that every human must have each day to sustain life.

Imagine the relief, and appreciation, that many people who were concerned about a possible food shortage felt when they

realized that would not happen because farmers and ranchers were going about their regular business.

The farming and ag industry has always ranked high in the poll but this was the first year it ranked No. 1 and it was a very clear No. 1.

The grocery industry ranked No. 2 with a 63 percent total positive rating and the restaurant industry ranked No. 3 at 61 percent.

The food industry took the top three spots, which shows that the shutdowns related to the COVID outbreak certainly made Americans think a little more about how food is produced and distributed to them.

We in the agricultural industry have always talked about trying to educate consumers about where their food comes from. Well, the COVID pandemic, as bad and scary as it is and as much as we all wish it never occurred, did a heck of a job of accomplishing that. ■

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This is an artist's rendering of the Idaho Wheat Commission's planned new \$5.5 million building in downtown Boise. The commission is moving ahead cautiously with the project. Idaho Wheat Commission drawing

New building

New wheat commission building in the works

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE – The Idaho Wheat Commission has opted to continue moving forward, cautiously, with plans to build a new, \$5.5 million building in downtown Boise.

A final decision has not been made and could be impacted by construction costs,

how the downtown business market shakes out following the COVID-19 outbreak — will most people return to work in that area or will they continue to work from home? — and whether the required legislative approval is granted.

“We’re still planning to move forward but we’re in a holding pattern at this point,” said IWC Executive Director Casey

Chumrau. “It’s hurry up and wait at this point (but) the wheat commissioners have decided to continue exploring the option. We’re moving forward with the plans but with the understanding that there are still some key ‘no-go’ points.”

The wheat commission, which used to pay rent for a space in the Owyhee Plaza in downtown Boise, purchased its current

building at 821 W. State Street, one block from the Idaho Capitol building, for \$1.2 million in 2003.

The building is known as the Idaho Wheat and Ag Center and has the “Idaho Wheat” logo on it as well. It has provided a return on investment for wheat growers because several other agricultural groups pay the IWC rent to reside there.

But the aging building – it was built in 1945 – has reached a point where significant investments are needed to maintain it at a functional level, Chumrau said.

“It’s been a very good investment for wheat growers because we’ve been getting a return on our investment,” she said.

“But it’s getting to the point now where the maintenance is becoming so costly that it’s eating into the returns. It has not continued to be as big of an asset as it was previously.”

“It’s a superb location but an aging building so this new building would be an investment for the future,” said former IWC Executive Director Blaine Jacobson, who initiated the plans for upgrading the current building and will volunteer his time to guide the project through to completion.

Jacobson, who retired at the end of June, said the current building provided a nice return on investment for the state’s wheat farmers, who pay an assessment that funds the wheat commission.

“We anticipate that over time, the same thing will happen with this building,” he said.

While it hasn’t made a final decision yet, the commission does plan to move forward with the plans if the Idaho Legislature approves of the idea, construction costs don’t soar and the downtown business market remains stable, said IWC Chairman Joe Anderson.

The commission has been purposefully building up a cash reserve with the purpose of updating the current building at some point in the future, he said in a column that appeared in the Idaho Grain Producers Association’s fall magazine.



Photo by Sean Ellis

Members of the Idaho Wheat Commission discuss an issue during one of the group’s regular meetings in the Idaho Wheat Commission building in downtown Boise. The wheat commission is moving forward with plans to construct a new \$5.5 million building in the same spot.

“Well, that time has come,” he said. “Now is time to knock down the old building and build an Idaho Wheat and Ag Center for the future.”

The IWC’s five commissioners, who represent wheat farmers throughout the state

Barley commissioners “understand that it’s an opportunity to make an investment for the future,” said IBC Administrator Laura Wilder. “Although it may be inconvenient during the construction, we have to look at the big picture for the long-term and (the commissioners) put their support behind the wheat commission in making the best decision that will serve Idaho agriculture and the grain industry for the future.”

Besides the wheat and barley commissions, current tenants of the building include the Idaho Grain Producers Association, Idaho Wine Commission, Idaho Bean Commission, Milk Pro-

ducers of Idaho and leading staff from the University of Idaho’s College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.

Since 2003, the building has served as the brain hub of Idaho agriculture, especially during the legislative session, when Food Producers of Idaho, which represents 40 of the state’s main agricultural organizations, meets there weekly to discuss var-

“We will not go into this blindly. We will not go forward just to go forward. We want to make sure this is truly a good investment of grower dollars and that it will be something that gives us returns in the medium and long term.”

— IWC Executive Director Casey Chumrau

and are growers themselves, voted recently to continue exploring the plans.

But Chumrau said the commission also asked for and received feedback from the building’s current tenants before making that decision to move forward.

The Idaho Barley Commission’s board of directors recently voted to support moving forward with the plans for a new building.

ious pieces of legislation that could impact the state's agricultural industry.

The building has served as a natural gathering place for people involved in Idaho's ag industry and has served as the agricultural hub of downtown Boise.

"The synergism we have had with all of the different ag groups and university over last 17 years because of that building has been incredible," Anderson told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation. "It has been an incredible investment that has paid off nicely for Idaho's agriculture industry."

Chumrau said that synergism between ag groups has been one of if not the biggest benefit of the building.

"We have cultivated a really nice agricultural group here in the building and it's a center for collaboration," she said. "It helps us all be aware of what else is going on in the ag industry and we can all support each other. It's just become a really nice center for agriculture."

The renovation plans for the building include demolishing the current 7,500-square-foot building, which is one-and-a-half stories high and includes an upstairs meeting room, and replacing it with a 27,336-square-foot building that is three stories high.

The ground floor would be used for retail space and office space would be included on the second and third floors.

The rooftop would include an outdoor deck that, Chumrau said, "may be another revenue generator where outside groups could rent that space because rooftop property is in short supply here in downtown Boise and it would make a really good area for meetings and corporate events."

Anderson said one of the biggest benefits of the new building would be much bigger meeting space.

"Meeting space is getting hard to book and expensive in Boise," he told IFBF.

"That will be an incredible benefit to IGPA, the wheat commission, the barley commission and any of the other (groups) in the building."

The plans for a new building have been carefully thought out over several years, Jacobson said, and architectural design and blueprints for a new building are in place now.



Photo by Sean Ellis

Members of the Idaho Bean Commission discuss an issue during one of the group's regular meetings in the Idaho Wheat Commission building in downtown Boise. The wheat commission is moving forward with plans to construct a new \$5.5 million building in the same spot. The new building would have much bigger meeting space.

If a final decision is made to move forward, construction would likely start in summer 2021 and the project would be completed in about a year.

"We will not go into this blindly," Chumrau said. "We will not go forward just to go forward. We want to make sure this is truly a good investment of grower dollars and that it will be something that gives us returns in the medium and long term."

Jacobson said that one of the main things the commission will be looking at closely before making a final decision is downtown office demand post-COVID "because more businesses are working from home. We want to assure ourselves that the downtown business market is going to continue to be stable and strong."

The commission also wants to make sure construction costs don't soar and the IWC needs approval from the Idaho Legislature to move forward.

If the new building is built, the commission will spend about \$2.5 million of its current cash reserve of \$3.5 million toward the project. The rest of the money would come through the state's bonding authority and the idea would be to pay that back over 10 years.

Because parking in downtown Boise

is in short supply, one of the most talked about features of the new building is a semi-automated, stackable car parking system. The technology for this system was developed in Asia and it would be the first such system in Idaho.

The parking system would have 30 spaces – three high and 10 across – and it would automatically rotate vehicles over or up as needed.

The building would include another 10 surface parking spaces.

Chumrau said there is the possibility that other ag groups would want to locate to the new building and the additional retail, parking, rooftop and office space could help ensure a strong return on investment for the new building.

Earlier in the exploration process, the new building was set to be one or two stories high.

However, Chumrau said, the decision was made to increase the size of the building at the recommendation of some local government officials as well as downtown planning developers who advised the wheat commission that it could help ensure a strong return on investment by adding additional retail, office and parking rental space as rental options. ■



2021 AFBF YOUNG FARMERS & RANCHERS

COMPETITION AWARDS



The YF&R program helps young members shape their future and American agriculture through leadership development and personal growth opportunities. Three competitions enable members to showcase their leadership experience, communication skills and successful business plans as they compete against the best of the best from each state Farm Bureau.

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Photos by Jordan Kaye

Potatoes are sorted and bagged at Stoddard Farms near Grace on Sept. 24. Grace High School shuts down for two weeks each year so students can help bring in the area's iconic and important potato crop.

Harvest

mVPS

High school athletes on potato harvest break help E. Idaho farmers bring in crop

By **Jordan Kaye**
Idaho State Journal

GRACE — Gage Stoddard woke up around 5 a.m. on the morning of Sept. 24. He hopped out of bed, laced his new shoes, got into his 1995 Chevy Silverado and drove into the darkness of rural Caribou County.

There were only a few streetlights lit when he rolled into the nearby Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,

opening the gym doors with a key his uncle had given him.

There was a long day ahead for the Grace High School student athlete and no time to waste.

Grace School District, which includes two elementary schools and Grace Junior/Senior High, is one of a handful of districts in the Gem State that annually receives two weeks off so that parents, faculty and students can all work the potato harvest.

For students like Stoddard who participate in harvest, the “break” means hard labor from sunup until sundown.

Stoddard grabbed his basketball and began an early morning shooting routine, putting up a few hundred shots in an hour before returning home at 6:30 a.m. for a quick shower and a brief nap until a text woke him up.

Stoddard again hopped in his Silverado, this time sporting a red Grace High basketball hoodie, blue jeans that he

tucked into cowboy boots and a black and white fitted hat bearing the logo of his destination: Stoddard Farms.

The family farm was already buzzing at 7:16 a.m. when Stoddard arrived. There was a semi-truck parked out front, and it wouldn't leave until 800 50-pound bags of potatoes were deposited in the back.

Right now, along with a gang of kids of all ages, filling it was Stoddard's job.

The littlest kids could vanish under the size of the bags, struggling to lug sacks of starch that tipped the scales at a little more than half of their body weight.

The older kids with more mature bodies used strength and technique that made it obvious this wasn't their first time slinging spuds. Stoddard eventually joined them, hauling sack after sack until the truck drove off.

Like Stoddard, most of the others play sports as well.

"All 33 of my athletes, all of them work in potatoes," said Brandon Sanchez, Grace High's football coach.

"They're all out at a farm working," added Stoddard, a football and basketball standout at Grace who's hoping for a college hoops scholarship.

It's not fun work. They all know that. But, then again, is the alternative really much better?

Stoddard, like most of the kids lugging potatoes, knows he'll be back in school in a week's time.

And, suddenly, in the midst of the sweat pouring down his neck, or his back tensing up like an icicle, or his tired eye, "And then I'm thinking, 'Oh, I could be listening to my English teacher talking about syllables or something,'" Stoddard said. "I'd rather be playing with potatoes than playing with words."



Travis Draper leans against the padded wall on the south side of Grace High's gym. The first-year Grace athletic director is still in the same outfit — shorts and a black Under Armour polo — he donned more than 12 hours earlier, when the temperature was 20 degrees



Potatoes are sorted at Stoddard Farms Sept. 24.

cooler, the sun was still on the horizon and more than 2,000 bags of potatoes at Stoddard Farms still had to be moved into cars.

Waiting on Thursday night's varsity volleyball game to begin, he tries to contextualize how important the harvest is to the community. What it means to Grace's economy and to its people and to its reputation.

Then he stops.

"There's our principal over there in the red shirt," Draper says, pointing. "He has to run the scoreboard tonight because the person who usually does it is still working in the fields."

For two weeks every September, that's Principal Stephen Brady's only job.

"Probably 60 percent of our student body will either be working in potatoes or babysitting for somebody who's working in potatoes," said Brady, who for the 23rd straight harvest drove potato trucks for nearby Christensen Farms.

The logistics of a two-week school hiatus are fairly simple. The school board sets a tentative date each year, guessing when the harvest will start. By September, the Grace Seed Growers Association has given the school board a firm start

date.

This year, because of the hot summer, the tentative date moved up and school let out on Sept. 16 for a Sept. 30 return.

The city's youth and adults alike spend two weeks on potato farms making money. Stoddard Farms usually starts hiring kids around age 14 and pays them \$9.50 an hour, which — if they work the normal 65 to 70 hours a week during the harvest break — could net them more than a grand in no time.

"Harvest is really important for a lot of the families and kids around here," said Jeremy Stoddard, co-owner of Stoddard Farms and Gage Stoddard's father. "There's not a lot of jobs (for kids), so this is their best opportunity to make money to pay for school clothes or school fees (to play sports)."



Gage Stoddard's brown boots dip into the tin of water that sits just outside cellar No. 2 at Stoddard Farms, a precaution to keep the potatoes clean and disease-free. He's flanked by his dad and uncles Jason and Jordan, and the quartet is chuckling as they bask in the sight of,



Gage Stoddard, a Grace High School student-athlete, helps with the potato harvest at Stoddard Farms near Grace.

really, their own naivety.

They forgot how crazy their operation is.

Their whole life has been this farm, ever since Gage Stoddard's great-grandfather, Frank, rented 160 acres of land in 1957. Since then, it's grown to nearly 4,600 acres with 40 different fields and six of those cellars, each of which holds 8 million pounds of spuds.

The vastness of the operation isn't shocking anymore. The conveyor belts that whisk millions of pounds of potatoes past grabby hands and ping-ponging eyes seem like the only rational way to move potatoes.

Inside their potato cellar, a machine that resembles a wood-chipper spits out tubers, creating a potato Mt. Everest.

Panchito Cortez controls the rapid-fire conveyor belt with a joystick, displaying the concentration of a gamer on level 20 of Pac-Man.

For a second, Stoddard tells Cortez he'll take over.

He takes a few steps left and gets his hands on the joystick that's attached to the red conveyor belts. He explains how all the pieces work, tries to plateau the tower of dirt-laden potatoes and inadvertently shows how normal this all is to him.

And that's what outsiders have a tough time fathoming. Really, they get two weeks off school for, what, a potato harvest? Is that really necessary?

"It's really important and, luckily, our

school board and school administrators understand how important it is. We couldn't get it done in the time we need to without the community's help," Jeremy Stoddard said. "If we didn't have those people to do it, it would take us — I don't even know how long. A couple months?"



Perhaps the "Famous Potatoes" tagline on the bottom of Idaho license plates should sufficiently explain the cachet potatoes hold in the Gem State.

But when Sara Anderson tries to explain the harvest to her club volleyball teammates from Logan, Utah, it's like

she's reading line-by-line from the U.S. tax code.

"They're always like, 'What!? You're off school?' and I'm like, 'Yeah, for two weeks. I just work,'" Anderson, a senior libero on the Grace volleyball team, said. "They're like, 'Do you go pick potatoes out of the field?'" I'm like, 'Not quite.'"

Instead, Anderson, like most of the women working on the farm, stands up on a metal platform seven to 10 hours a day, one of the first sets of eyes to watch the potato truck dump a new batch onto the conveyor belt.

And with her headphones in — usually playing music, podcasts or books — Anderson picks rocks and dirt clods out of the river of potatoes.

That's one of four main jobs that the kids working at Stoddard Farms take up. During harvest, the farm boosts its employee count from 18 to about 45.

The additional help like Anderson is crucial in picking out dirt clods, loading and unloading potatoes at the market, bagging the potatoes off the conveyor belt and separating the seed potatoes.

The small spuds the Stoddards store in the cellar are sold to commercial farms, which use them as seed. Potatoes that are over 12 ounces, which are too big for seed, are bagged and sold in bulk.

Separating potatoes and picking out dirt isn't exactly a physically demanding job, but it's not an ideal gig for the queasy.

It's shocking those doing it don't keep Dramamine (a motion sickness medicine) handy or set an empty bucket nearby just in case. Five minutes of watching potatoes whiz by and you'll feel like you just log-rolled down a grass hill.

The experienced members of Stoddard Farms are easy to spot. The efficient ones don't keep their eyes upstream, instead focusing on the few inches in front of them, spotting dirt clods or massive potatoes like they're gold. Secondly, they're wearing some sort of face covering.

Grace volleyball player Jillian Smith wore a cloth mask with plastic goggles that may as well have been taken from biology class. This isn't a COVID precaution but, rather, an innovation against



Potatoes are sorted and stacked.

the constant stream of dirt and dust that inevitably finds uncovered crevices.

On Sept. 24, Stoddard's little brother, Boston, stood near his mom and brother, separating potatoes for about 10 seconds before drawing ire for picking spuds smaller than his hand.

"What are we making?" Stoddard asked his little brother, pausing a second while trying to think of a good punch line. "Tater tots?"

Boston shrugged it off and went back to bagging potatoes. He taped up a full 50-pound paper sack and bent down. The bag was to be placed on a trailer just a few feet off the ground, where a young man stood egging on the 9-year-old, reminding everyone within shouting distance that, just a day prior, Boston got the bag on his shoulder before he tipped over.

This time he hucked it on his shoulder and stumbled a few steps before someone held him upright. He threw it on the trailer and bragged like he just knocked out Mike Tyson.

"Kids find ways to have fun in everything they do," Gage said. "But with 800 potato sacks, there's not much you can do to make that fun."

◆ ◆ ◆
Draper is walking away from the varsity volleyball game late Thursday, sneaking out the back door to check up on the junior high football game that he quickly realizes has already concluded.

A stream of parents and kids still in uniform are walking to their cars, and the athletic director starts pointing out faces he recognizes. "He worked with us this morning. He worked with us."

He walks down to the empty football field, folds his arms on the chain-linked fence and stares off into the lights of Grace's football field. The dew-laden grass is lit by the moon and moving lights off in the distance, produced by the tractors still going.

Draper looks past the metal bleachers and out to the darkened fields that sprawl like the ocean, his eyes deadpan staring at Grace's lifeblood. He has just walked past nearly a half-dozen sullen junior high football players, and he knows the football game they just played wasn't the toughest part of their day.

It reminds him of the movie, "Remember the Titans."

"When they're like, 'Those oth-



Potatoes are stored at Stoddard Farms near Grace Sept. 24.

er schools don't have to do what we're doing," Draper said. "Someone should come up with a speech about potato harvest like that."

Back inside, Grace's volleyball coach Heidi Stoddard (Gage's mom and Jeremy's wife) is sitting on the bleachers, looking

through the stats of a 3-0 loss to Bear Lake, her alma mater. The loss isn't sitting well but, after all, it's harvest.

"Sometimes our win-loss record during the potato harvest isn't the best," Brady said.

Added Sanchez: "Historically, the games during harvest are typically our toughest games ... We have 6 a.m. practices every day and then at 8 a.m. I turn them loose and they work all day long."

Two Fridays ago, Grace played Challis, which meant pulling the football players off the farm early for a five-hour bus ride to what would become a 46-6 victory. Some think the five hours of sleep helped.

Last week, the junior varsity volleyball team lost. Draper asked what happened. Turns out, most of the team was up until 2 a.m. picking potatoes.

Sanchez remembered a player who suffered a concussion during harvest. How'd he get it? A buddy chucked a 50-pound bag of potatoes at him.

There are downsides, of course. Fatigue has consequences. But these kids are helping their town. And, without potatoes, there's no Grace.

But, more than that, there's the bigger picture every parent, student and farmer believes in — that the early mornings, the exhaustive repetition of their jobs and the balancing act of spending 12 hours a day working on a potato farm before playing in a game will be beneficial at some point.

That when life gets tough, they'll remember working harvest and, suddenly, it won't be as tough.

"It just helps the kids," Jeremy Stoddard said. "When they get through it and when they look back, they can say, 'Hey, I did that,' and it can give them some confidence and some mental strength to know they can get through stuff." ■

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Photo by Sean Ellis

A barley field near Soda Springs is harvested in September. A recent Gallup poll showed that Americans feel more positive about farming and agriculture than any other industry.

Farming No. 1 for first time in Gallup industry poll

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – In every dark cloud, it is said, there is a silver lining and it appears the COVID-19 outbreak has

helped Americans appreciate the agricultural industry even more.

For the first time ever in a special Gallup poll's history, Americans have rated farming and agriculture as the business or industry they feel most positive about.

The national poll, which was conducted July 30-Aug. 12 and released Sept. 8, asked Americans whether their overall view of certain businesses and industries was very positive, somewhat positive, neutral, somewhat negative or

very negative.

Farming and agriculture ranked No. 1 with a total positive rating of 69 percent and a net positive rating (total positive minus total negative) of 58 percentage points.

The grocery industry ranked No. 2 at 63 percent and 51 percent and the restaurant industry ranked No. 3 at 61 percent and 46 percent.

The computer industry ranked No. 4 at 56 percent and 44 percent and was the highest rated non-food related industry.

It was the first time in the poll's 20-year history that farming and agriculture grabbed the top spot. The industry's total 69 percent positive response was an 11-point increase over last year's 58 percent rating.

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President Bryan Searle, a farmer from Shelley, said the initial food scare that the coronavirus outbreak created likely played a role in Americans realizing just how critical agriculture is to the nation.

When Americans realized that farmers and ranchers were plowing ahead with their usual plans to produce an abundant and affordable food supply, that food scare dissipated but people were left with a positive feeling about agriculture as a result, he said.

"The pandemic and the food scare that it produced had people realizing the store does not produce food," Searle said. "I think that's a big part of the reason for the higher positive feeling that people have about farming and agriculture."

Soon after the pandemic hit, there was an immediate run on certain food products at grocery stores and that resulted in some bare shelves and concern bordering on panic among some people.

But American Farm Bureau Federation, as well as Idaho Farm Bureau Federation and other state Farm Bureaus, made major efforts to assure people that there would not be any national food shortages and farmers and ranchers were

moving ahead with their normal plans.

In particular, AFBF's #StillFarming social media campaign, which state Farm Bureaus helped spread, was viewed by millions of people.

In a first-world country like the United States, it's sometimes easy for people to lose track of things that matter the most until they get a little bit of a shock, said St. Anthony farmer Zak Miller, CEO of IFBF.

That's likely what happened with the coronavirus outbreak and initial food scare, he said. People panicked early on but came to appreciate farming and ranching even more when they realized the agriculture industry wasn't flinching in the face of the pandemic.

"The poll results are confirmation of what we've always known and that's that consumers love farmers but they don't always understand what we are and what we do," he said. "This pandemic, while we wish it hadn't happened, has given agriculture the opportunity to show what we are and what we do. Farmers are never going to run from a challenge and will always be on the front line to produce and make sure that food is always available to consumers."

Searle said the positive and frequent comments about farmers by President Donald Trump may have also played a role in how people feel about the agricultural industry.

"Trump says 'farmers,' and positive things about them, more than any other president in my lifetime," he said. "He's done a lot to educate people about where our food comes from and that's our farmers. You have to give him credit because he definitely talks about farmers a lot."

At the bottom of the barrel in this year's Gallup poll on Americans' views of various business and industry sectors was the federal government with a net positive rating of minus-20 percent, followed by the pharmaceutical (minus-15) and sports industries (minus-10). ■

“Farmers are never going to run from a challenge and will always be on the front line to produce and make sure that food is always available to consumers.”

— Zak Miller,
CEO of IFBF

Idaho Farm Bureau

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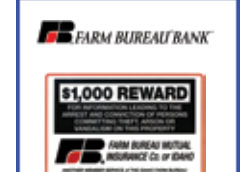
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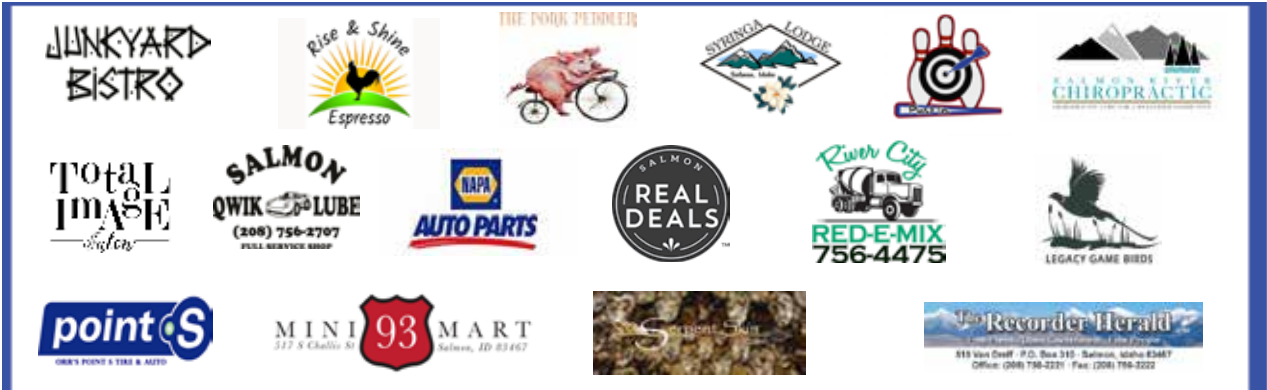
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Photo by Audra Cochran

When planting trees into an existing pasture vegetation, control is needed to help get trees established.

Agroforestry and silvopasture – growing trees in your pasture, or vice versa?

By Randy Brooks and Audra Cochran
University of Idaho

Before I start off talking about this month's topic, I'd like to introduce a new member of the University of Idaho's Extension Forestry Team – Audra Cochran, associate extension forestry educator.

Audra was born and raised on a ranch in Clearwater County, Idaho. Her father and husband are both loggers and they also raise cattle, grow crops, and swath a lot of hay. Audra grew up showing livestock in 4-H, which is where I first met her.

She received her undergraduate degree at the University of Idaho in animal science and studied under my direction to



Audra Cochran
Forestry educator

receive her master's in natural resources. Her master's research centered around converting forest harvesting residuals (slash) into biofuels, specifically wood pellets utilizing a tractor mounted PTO driven pellet

making machine. However, that's a future article.

To start off, what is agroforestry and silvopasture? Agroforestry is the inten-



tional integration of trees and shrubs into crop and animal farming systems to create environmental, economic, and social benefits. It has been practiced in the United States and around the world for centuries.

Silvopasture (silva is the Latin root for the word forest) is the practice of integrating trees, forage, and the grazing of domesticated animals in a mutually beneficial way. It utilizes the principles of managed grazing, and it is one of several distinct forms of agroforestry.

Silvopasture combines the areas of Audra's undergraduate and graduate degrees. Silvopasture is the deliberate introduction of timber into a forage production system, or vice versa.

With silvopasture, timber and pasture are managed as a single integrated system. It is most often implemented to increase profitability, reduce risk, and augment environmental benefits from land management.

Silvopasture systems are designed to produce a high-value timber component while providing short-term cash flow from the livestock component. However, the ability of pasture or rangeland to support timber production is hard to predict.

Many forage plants are more shallowly rooted than trees are, and a productive forage pasture may have soils that are too shallow to support tree production.

When planting trees into an existing or recently seeded pasture, vegetation control is critical. Established pastures have grass roots that form a fibrous mat throughout the upper soil layer. In dry summer climates, conifer seedlings grow best when grass competition is controlled for the first three years.

This can be accomplished through various means of site preparation. Apply an herbicide or plow a two to four-foot-wide strip for each row of trees to be planted.

In some areas, a prescribed burn or pesticide application may be needed to control rodents prior to and after tree planting. Follow-up with a selective herbicide may be needed for the next two to three years until the trees are well established.



Photo by Audra Cochran

With silvopasture, timber and pasture are managed as a single integrated system.

The desired pasture mix will vary with site characteristics and the desires of the land manager. Orchardgrass, tall fescue, and perennial ryegrass along with a clover species are commonly used silvopasture forages.

Trees generally have little impact on forage production until shading becomes dense enough to limit sunlight to the understory. At this point, it might be time to thin the trees, or even harvest for income.

Forage production of warm season species can be reduced somewhat. Orchardgrass seems to tolerate the environment under trees better than perennial ryegrass or Kentucky bluegrass.

Although tall fescue does well under trees, it has the lowest forage value and highest degree of competition of the forages.

Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine are

the two dominant timber species that grow best in our area. Some landowners have even planted hybrid poplar.

Regardless of what species is used, it is generally recommended that seedlings are purchased locally or from a locally adapted seed source. These seedlings are both quicker to establish and grow and can be more tolerant of browse and other damage.

Silvopastures are generally planted at about 200-300 trees per acre, and can be planted in grids, single rows, multiple rows, or even clusters. This style of planting provides for wide open alleys for forage production and easy access for livestock grazing, hay harvesting, fertilizer spreading, spraying, and other agricultural practices.

Width of the alley should be determined by width of farm equipment. For example, a 20-foot alley provides easy



Photo by Audra Cochran

Grazing can be an effective best management practice for helping reduce fine fuel loading during fire season.

access for cutting hay with a 16-foot swather.

Trees can offer habitat for all types of wildlife such as shelter and nesting. However, trees may be damaged by wild animals and livestock which can eat, rub, or step on them. Multiple damage events may kill trees, but single events generally only slow growth.

Conifers are especially sensitive to the removal of the topmost leader. Most tree damage is likely to occur in the first two to three years when they are small and do not have their resinous chemical defense well established.

The best way to reduce the risk of damage during this period is by hay-

ing rather than grazing. This approach does not resolve the problem of damage by native wildlife herbivores. Young trees may be protected with chemical repellants, mesh tubes, or some type of appropriate fencing.

Established conifers are not as attractive to large herbivores when other forage is present. If heavy browsing is observed, there may be a deficiency in the livestock diet.

Lastly, trees that provide shade or wind protection can have a climate-stabilizing effect by reducing heat stress and wind chill of the livestock. Protection from trees can reduce the direct cold effect by 50% or more and reduce wind

velocity by as much as 70%.

Livestock require less feed energy, so their performance is improved, and mortality is reduced. Livestock grazing in these systems can also help with nutrient recycling and fuel load reduction, aiding in the overall health and wellbeing of seedlings.

Silvopastoral systems can be mutually beneficial to both livestock and timber production, as well as add additional revenue channels for landowners. And, everyone likes to see trees, right?

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

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Photo by Sean Ellis

Wine grapes are harvested in a vineyard in Caldwell Oct. 12. Members of the state's wine industry say yields are average this year but quality looks great.

Wine grape yields down but quality looks great

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

CALDWELL – With Idaho's wine grape harvest well under way, yields are about average this year and maybe even

down a bit, but quality looks great, according to vintners and vineyard owners.

"It looks awesome. I've been hearing good comments on quality," said Dale Jeffers, manager of Idaho's largest vineyard, Skyline Vineyards near Nampa. "I

think across the board, yields are probably about average. Some varieties are up, some varieties are down."

"Everybody we've talked to is saying they are seeing slightly reduced crop yields," said Martin Fujishin, owner of

“We were very fortunate in that the local wine clientele still supported us very strongly through the pandemic. But with that being said, we definitely saw a big drop in tourism and the wholesale side of our business.”

— Martin Fujishin, owner of Fujishin Family Cellars

Fujishin Family Cellars in Caldwell in the heart of Idaho wine country. “But overall, (quality) looks pretty good.”

Things are looking pretty good at Williamson Orchards and Vineyards in the Sunny Slope area near Caldwell in southwestern Idaho, where most of the state’s wine grapes are grown, said manager Mike Williamson.

“We are hitting most of our estimates and targets for time of production,” he said. “I’m pretty happy with how it’s going.”

Ron Bitner, owner of Bitner Vineyards in Caldwell, said his vineyard typically yields between two and three tons of wine grapes per acre.

“This year we’ll be closer to two tons,” he said. “Yields are average for me but the flavors look good. For Bitner Vineyards, it looks like an average to good year.”

Idaho’s 1,300 acres of vineyards and 60 wineries produce about 160,000 six-bottle cases of wine per year. According to a recent economic impact study sponsored by the Idaho Wine Commission, the state’s wine industry has a \$210 million economic impact on the state.

Members of the state’s wine grape industry said the smoke that blanketed much of the state shouldn’t have an impact on this year’s vintage because it wasn’t as heavy as the smoke that plagued other wine grape regions in the West.

“Smoke can have an impact on the grapes when you’re closest to the fire, like they were in California or Washington,” Williamson said. “But we got less smoke and I think the smoke that we got

in our region was at levels that are not going to negatively affect the wine grape quality.”

“Heavy concentrations of smoke can tend to cause some off flavors and off aromatics in the wines,” Fujishin said. “But we’ve been fortunate in Idaho that we haven’t seen those concentrations of smoke ... like they’ve seen in some other regions of the Northwest.”

What did have an impact on the state’s wine industry was the COVID-19 outbreak.

Fujishin said Idaho’s wine industry is driven primarily by the local market, meaning the nearby Boise metropolitan area, where the bulk of the state’s population lives.

“We were very fortunate in that the local wine clientele still supported us very strongly through the pandemic,” he said. “But with that being said, we definitely saw a big drop in tourism and the wholesale side of our business.”

Williamson said his business saw a drop in retail sales during the first few months of the COVID-related shutdowns.

“Just like every retail business out there, we had to be nimble in our response to how we do retail because the situation was changing rapidly, like every two weeks or so,” he said.

Although sales have been picking up in recent months, Williamson said, “It has impacted us for sure. It was a pretty bad couple of months.”

Bitner said income from his wine business is down about 25 percent due to the response to the coronavirus outbreak but he also said he has some loyal clientele

from the region that have helped him weather the storm.

“Our loyal clientele has gotten us through this,” he said.

The response to the COVID outbreak has also caused wineries and vineyards to alter how they conduct business.

“It’s caused us to change a lot of things about the way that we run the tasting rooms and the way that we are handling the crowds that come out,” Fujishin said.

That includes making sure tasting room visitors, as well as farm workers, follow social distancing guidelines.

There has been a big emphasis on doing whatever is possible to prevent an outbreak among farm workers because that’s the last thing the wine grape industry needs, Fujishin said.

“It’s such a small industry, we can’t afford to be short anybody,” he said. “So it’s made us take those restrictions very seriously and really try to be as cautious as we can be going forward. All of us in the industry are pretty conscious of keeping everybody safe.”

At Skyline Vineyards, Jeffers said, one of the big COVID-related changes was doing away with a biometric time clock to prevent so many people from touching the same surface. Skyline is now keeping track of hours manually.

“We did what we could to try to keep people safe,” Jeffers said.

The good news during the pandemic, Fujishin said, is that wine grapes don’t give a lick about COVID and they look great this year.

“The grapes don’t care if it’s a pandemic or not,” he said. “They are just going to keep on doing what grapes do.” ■



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Notice of Annual Meeting of Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance Co. of Idaho

To all policyholders: The 2021 annual meeting for policyholders of Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance Co. of Idaho will be held on Friday, Feb. 5, 2021, at 10 a.m. at the company's home office at 275 Tierra Vista Drive in Pocatello, Idaho. You are invited to attend.

Tom Lyons
Secretary

Notice of Stockholders Meetings

The following annual stockholders meetings will take place Friday, Feb. 5, 2021, at the Idaho Farm Bureau home office, 275 Tierra Vista Drive in Pocatello, Idaho.

The board of directors for each company will be elected at these meetings.

10:45 a.m. - Farm Bureau Marketing Association of Idaho

11 a.m. - FB Development Corporation of Idaho

Zak Miller
Executive Vice President, CEO



Photo by Sean Ellis

Barley is harvested in a field near Soda Springs in September. USDA's second round of coronavirus farm relief payments are expected to help more Idaho farmers, including barley producers.

Second round of farm relief could help more Idaho farmers

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – USDA's second round of coronavirus farm relief assistance is expected to help more Idaho farmers

than the first round.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's first Coronavirus Food Assistance Program, which was announced April 17, provided a total of up to \$16 billion in

direct payments to farmers and ranchers impacted by the reactions to COVID-19.

The application period for the first CFAP program ended Sept. 11.

The USDA on Sept. 17 announced a

“There is no doubt they were impacted and this is a huge win for Idaho and wheat growers across the country, really. Any support our growers can get right now is very welcome.”

— Casey Chumrau, executive director of the Idaho Wheat Commission

second round of financial assistance – a total of \$14 billion – to producers who have been directly impacted by the coronavirus outbreak.

USDA’s Farm Service Agency is accepting CFAP 2 applications through Dec. 11.

Most classes of wheat and barley grown in Idaho were excluded from eligibility for the CFAP 1 payments.

But now all classes of wheat and barley are eligible to apply for the CFAP 2 assistance.

“We’re very happy with that development,” said Casey Chumrau, executive director of the Idaho Wheat Commission, which along with other wheat organizations made the case to USDA that all wheat growers should be eligible for CFAP payments. “All along we have wanted all of our growers to have the opportunity to receive these payments.”

She said there is no question wheat farmers have suffered as a result of the reaction to the coronavirus outbreak.

“There is no doubt they were impacted and this is a huge win for Idaho and wheat growers across the country, really,” Chumrau said. “Any support our growers can get right now is very welcome.”

Idaho leads the nation in barley production and most of the barley grown here is produced under contract, but contracted barley was not eligible for the first round of CFAP payments. But contracted and other classes of barley are eligible for CFAP 2 assistance.

“We’re very pleased that they updated the program to make it more widely available to more growers, especially

those that have risk even though they have contracts,” said Laura Wilder, administrator of the Idaho Barley Commission, which made the case to USDA for including contracted barley in the CFAP program. “Most barley growers will be eligible now.”

Wheat and barley are the No. 2 and 5 crops in Idaho in terms of farm-cash receipts and together Gem State farmers who grow those crops brought in \$750 million in farm-cash receipts last year.

“We are thrilled that all classes of wheat and barley are eligible for CFAP 2. That’s wonderful news,” said Stacey Satterlee, executive director of Idaho Grain Producers Association, which represents wheat and barley farmers in Idaho.

She said there is no doubt wheat and barley farmers felt the pinch financially from COVID-19 and a lot of effort went into making the case to USDA.

“A lot of work went into communicating that to USDA and we were really glad to see that wheat and barley are eligible for CFAP 2,” Satterlee said.

Potatoes were initially excluded from the first CFAP program but were later included after a major effort by the Idaho and U.S. potato industry convinced USDA that spud farmers were impacted significantly by the reaction to the coronavirus outbreak.

Potatoes are also eligible under CFAP 2.

That’s good news for Idaho farmers as well as the state’s economy since spuds are a multi-billion-dollar business in Idaho. Idaho potato farmers brought in just over \$1 billion in farm-cash receipts last year and when the various potato

processing plants are considered, spuds bring in billions of dollars to the state’s economy each year.

If potato farmers received CFAP 1 payments, they are still eligible for CFAP 2 payments and the new program is for contract process growers as well as seed and fresh potato growers.

Idaho dairy farmers and cattle producers, who were also eligible for CFAP 1 payments, are eligible as well for CFAP 2 assistance.

Dairy is the state’s top agricultural sector in terms of farm-cash receipts and beef cattle ranks second. Together, those two commodities brought in \$4.6 billion in farm-cash receipts in Idaho last year.

Idaho dairy farmers, who sell about 60 percent of their product through foodservice channels, were initially hampered when the coronavirus outbreak caused most foodservice outlets to close and dairy prices sunk to well below break-even prices as a result, although they have since rebounded.

Idaho Dairymen’s Association Executive Director Rick Naerebout said the CFAP assistance has helped the state’s dairy operations weather the COVID storm.

“It has been a significant help,” he said.

The assistance has also helped the state’s cattle producers, said Cameron Mulrony, executive vice president of the Idaho Cattlemen’s Association.

“I think it has helped for sure,” he said. “Cattle producers were hurt pretty bad when we had that initial big price drop but we’re getting a little bit of help” from the CFAP assistance. ■

Understanding how to hedge with futures

Remember back in August when the talk was that we needed higher prices for our commodities? Well, now we have higher prices.

The question back in August should have been, how much higher do we need? At the time I was writing this article, the Chicago December futures were trading over a dollar higher than the first week in August.

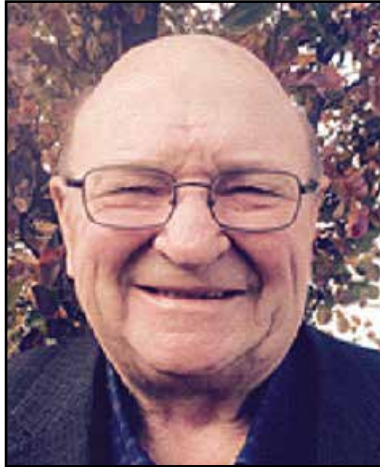
If we are just looking at the futures, we could say that the cash bids are good. However, what is the other factor in our cash bid equation?

Let's not forget the basis.

Remember, the basis is our best indicator of the local supply and demand situation. As the futures have strengthened, the basis has weakened – not penny for penny with the strength in the futures, but considerably. Thus, the cash bids haven't strengthened as much as the futures.

There are a good number of producers who feel that this isn't necessarily fair but remember, if the mills and exporters weren't buying any wheat, the basis wouldn't remain on its ear.

Through this entire period of time, the supply of wheat has outpaced the demand. This is evident in the soft white market in Portland where the basis has weakened from 100 over for October delivery to 25 under for October delivery. The high basis was last spring when the futures were low and it has weakened



since then.

I visit with producers who continue to watch the cash bids in their marketing program. This is good, I do understand that the cash bid is what pays the bills. However, the markets have changed and how we all market our commodities has also changed.

At this time, the Chicago wheat futures has moved from a carry charge market into an inverse market. This is when the front trading month is now trading at a premium to the deferred months.

Chicago has now taken away your incentive to store wheat for delivery into the deferred months.

What Chicago is telling us is that they need your wheat now and they aren't going to pay you to hold it until later in the year or into the spring. We don't experience these types of markets very often but when we do our marketing plan might need to also be adjusted.

We are seeing more producers looking at their 2021 crop and different ways to market this crop. At the current levels in the futures, producers could very well enter into a hedge to arrive contract for delivery next harvest or fall or they can sell the futures using their own trading account.

In both of these strategies, producers are able to set the futures side of their pricing equation. Once the futures side

has been established, you then watch the basis for a level that will establish a cash bid that is profitable.

In the cattle markets, we have seen the feeder cattle market selloff as calves come in off of the range and enter the market. This is usually the seasonal trend for this time of the year. We could see the feeder cattle market move back higher once the crop has been absorbed.

We did see producers forward contract their calves or hedge their calves using futures when the futures were trading in the mid to high 140s back in the first half of August.

The futures work well in the cattle markets as it is an easy transaction to enter into the futures. This could very well be a substitute sale of your calves until you are able to contract your calf crop.

Once you contract your calves, you offset your futures position and exit the futures market. This will help you manage any lag time there might be between when you want to sell calves and actually being able to contract them.

Keep in mind just how volatile these markets have been and could very well continue to be in the future. Hedging isn't complicated, it's just a little different than how things have been in the past and how we used to do it may not work for us in the future.

Hedging with futures may not work for you in your marketing program but knowing how it works will benefit you in developing your program.

Clark Johnston is a grain marketing specialist and owner of JC Management Co. of Ogden, Utah. He can be reached at clark@jcmanagement.net. ■

PRODUCTION

Continued from page 3

Total milk production in Idaho has risen between 3-4 percent each of the past couple of years, said Idaho Dairymen's Association Executive Director Rick Naerebout.

According to NASS, the average Idaho milk price in 2019 was \$18.30, up significantly from \$15.70 in 2018.

With higher prices and increased volume, "It makes sense that the 2019 value of production total would be a good jump from the previous year," Naerebout said.

Looking to this year, milk prices started out strong in 2020 but tanked as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. But they have since rebounded and it appears that Idaho's dairy industry, after suffering through several years of depressed prices, will do well this year, he said.

Sixty-five percent of the milk that Idaho dairies produce goes into cheese production and "cheese is one of the products that has really done well during the rebound from COVID," Naerebout said. "It looks like we're going to have a very financially healthy industry going into 2021."

Milk value represented 35 percent of the state's total agricultural value of production in 2019, up from 31 percent in 2018.

The total value of potato production in Idaho last year hit a record level at \$1.04 billion, up 2 percent compared with 2018.

Looking at how the state's iconic potato industry might fare in 2020, the shutdowns in the foodservice industry related to the COVID outbreak had a major impact on potato prices early on but the foodservice sector has turned around quicker than anticipated and spud prices have increased in recent months.

Idaho Potato Commission CEO Frank Muir said it's possible the Idaho potato industry could see another billion-dollar production year, depending on how the rest of 2020 shakes out.

"We've seen a rebound on foodservice quicker than anybody anticipated," he said, adding that there is strong demand from potato processors. "All of that points to strong prices this year. I think we have the potential to see another billion-dollar year in 2020."



Photo by Sean Ellis

The total value of agricultural production in Idaho rose 6 percent in 2019 compared with 2018.

The total value of Idaho's cattle and calves sector was \$1.41 billion in 2019, down slightly from the previous year.

Following milk, cattle was the state's No. 2 agricultural commodity in 2019 in terms of total value of production and potatoes ranked third and remained the top crop in the state.

The total value of hay production in Idaho last year was \$799 million, up 3 percent compared with 2018. Wheat ranked as the state's No. 5 ag commodity last year with a total production value of \$497 million, down 8 percent from 2018.

The NASS value of production report differs slightly from farm cash receipts rankings because the value of production rankings include those parts of a crop that are used on the farm and not sold. For example, a lot of hay is used on the farm and does not show up in the rankings for farm cash receipts, which is the money producers receive for their product.

That's why wheat ranks ahead of hay in the Idaho farm cash receipts rankings.

The state's top five farm commodities – milk, cattle, potatoes, hay and wheat – had a combined production value of \$6.61 billion in 2019, which represented 80 percent of the state's total value of ag production.

In 2018, those same five commodities represented 79 percent of the state's total value of ag production.

Sugar beets ranked sixth in Idaho last year with \$284 million in total production value, down 6 percent compared with 2018. Barley ranked No. 7 with \$277 million in total production value, up 3 percent, while

corn for grain ranked No. 8 at \$137 million, up 16 percent.

The total value of corn produced for grain in Idaho has soared in recent years, from \$83 million in 2016 to \$137 million last year.

The total value of hop production in Idaho has also soared in recent years and that crop ranked No. 9 with \$89 million worth of production value in 2019, a 4 percent increase over 2018.

Since 2015, the value of hop production in Idaho has increased from \$31 million to \$89 million as hop acres in the state have risen rapidly.

Onions moved into the top 10 last year, bumping out dry beans. The total value of onion production in Idaho last year was \$66 million, a 35 percent increase over 2018.

Peppermint, dry edible peas and oats all increased in value of production by double-digit percentages last year. The peppermint value was \$38 million, up 12 percent from 2018.

Other ag commodities outside the top 10 that decreased in value last year were trout, down 7 percent to \$37 million, lentils, down 33 percent to \$7.3 million, and honey, down 16 percent to \$4.9 million.

Idaho ranked No. 1 in the United States in four ag commodities last year (potatoes, barley, trout and peppermint oil), No. 2 in two commodities (sugar beets and hops), No. 3 in two commodities (alfalfa hay and milk), No. 4 in three commodities (dry onions, spring wheat and lentils) and No. 5 in two commodities (dry edible peas and haylage). ■

Idaho strengthens its spot as No. 1 barley state

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – Idaho solidified its spot as the nation's No. 1 barley-producing state in 2020 despite early season estimates that total barley production in the Gem State would decrease this year.

USDA's Small Grains Summary for 2020, released Sept. 30, showed that Idaho farmers produced 33.3 percent of the nation's total barley supply this year. That's up from 31.9 percent of the total during 2019.

Montana ranked No. 2 in total barley production this year with 27.6 percent of the nation's supply and North Dakota was third at 17.5 percent.

Idaho overtook North Dakota as the nation's top barley producing state in 2011 and after falling back to No. 2 in 2012, regained the No. 1 spot in 2013 and has retained it every year since then.

Earlier this year, USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service had forecast that Idaho's total barley production would decline slightly this year but it actually increased because of record yields.

According to NASS's Small Grains Summary, Idaho's roughly 4,000 barley farmers harvested 500,000 acres of barley this year, down from 520,000 acres during 2019.

But barley yields in Idaho averaged a record 110 bushels per acre this year, surpassing the previous record of 107 bushels per acre in 2016 and ahead of last year's average of 105 bushels per acre.

"Everyone has been talking about what great yields they had this year," said Idaho Barley Commission Administrator Laura Wilder. "Statewide, it was

the perfect combination of weather, growing conditions and great farmers."

Because of the record yields, Idaho farmers produced a total of 55 million bushels of barley during 2020, up slightly from 54.6 million during 2019.

Montana farmers actually harvested more barley acres at 725,000, but Idaho's average yield of 110 bushels per acre this year was far higher than Montana's average yield of 63 bushels per acre.

According to the USDA report, total barley production in the United States this year is estimated at 165 million bushels, down 4 percent from the 2019 total of 172 million bushels. The average yield nationwide was 77.5 bushels per acre, down 0.2 percent from last year.

Barley ranks as the state's No. 7 agricultural commodity in terms of total farm-cash receipts and about 70 percent of the state's barley crop is grown for the beer brewing industry. The rest is grown for human food or animal feed.

Farmers across the state reported excellent conditions this year for growing barley.

"In our dryland barley, we had really good yields and I've heard from other people that their yields were good as well," said Soda Springs farmer Scott Brown.

"We had a pretty good crop in our area," said Teton farmer Dwight Little, who grows his crop under irrigation.

Although barley yields in Idaho don't hit record levels every year, a number of factors combine to make the state a consistent place to grow high-quality barley, Brown said.

The weather, altitude, soil and other agronomic conditions here are ideal for producing a consistent barley crop, he said, and most of the state's barley crop

is irrigated, which insulates Idaho from the impacts of drought.

"All of those factors combine to make Idaho a great place to grow high-quality barley," Brown said.

Little said because southern Idaho's arid climate results in low humidity, growers here also don't have to contend with too many barley crop diseases such as fusarium head blight, which plagues some other major barley growing areas in the country.

"Idaho has the right combination of factors to grow world-class barley here," Wilder said. "Plus, Idaho barley growers do an outstanding job."

Brown said Idaho's barley industry is also blessed with having some good industry partners.

Those industry partners include major malting and beer brewing companies such as Anheuser-Busch, MolsonCoors and Great Western Malting that source a good chunk of their barley from Idaho.

The great growing conditions present in Idaho's barley-producing regions means the barley produced here meets the specifications those maltsters have consistently, year after year, Little said.

"A lot of these big maltsters and brewers are looking for a consistent source of barley to malt and Idaho is just a great place to grow barley and they understand that," he said.

A significant portion of the state's total barley production is also exported, most to Mexico for brewing and some to Asia for food barley.

"Markets drive production and it's that market that is driving our barley production in Idaho but we also do have the perfect conditions here to grow high-quality, world-class barley," Wilder said. ■

U of I hosts virtual field days due to COVID

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – The social distancing restrictions resulting from COVID-19 have resulted in University of Idaho Extension field days being canceled this year, but they were held virtually and are available for viewing online.

“The University of Idaho did a real nice job of shifting to virtual field days,” said Casey Chumrau, executive director of the Idaho Wheat Commission, which provides a significant amount of financial support to UI’s College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.

That money, as well as funds from other agricultural commissions in the state, helps support the research that UI scientists do to try to develop better crop varieties and help growers address a variety of agronomic challenges.

UI researchers host research trial field days at various sites across the state each year to provide farmers a close-up look at that research.

But those in-person field days were not held this year because of COVID-19. They were replaced by virtual, taped events that included researchers speaking about the results of their field trials and other things they would normally talk about during a normal, in-person field day.

“We just weren’t able to have field days in person but the university did conduct virtual field days and they are taped and available for people to view online,” said Laura Wilder, administrator of the Idaho Barley Commission, which spends about a third of its budget funding research projects, most of them conducted by UI scientists.

Virtual field days cannot replace in-person field days but the taped events do provide a silver lining in that they allow more people than normal to “attend,” Chumrau said.

“While you miss the in-person connection, there is a huge advantage in that more



Photo courtesy of University of Idaho

University of Idaho plant pathologist Juliet Marshall speaks about her ongoing agricultural research during a virtual field day event she recorded this summer. UI researchers have not been able to conduct in-person field days this year so they have created virtual field days that can be viewed online.

people can attend the virtual events,” she said. “Also, because the videos are recorded, people can watch them” any time.

UI researcher Juliet Marshall, a plant pathologist based out of Idaho Falls, said that in the virtual field days she created this year, she was able to include video presentations about certain crop varieties from plant breeders across the country who normally wouldn’t be able to attend a field day in-person.

“It’s interesting how some things work out even better than one would expect,” she said. “I thought it went pretty well especially considering what the alternative was, which was to do nothing.”

Marshall said the virtual field days aren’t professionally produced but they do provide the information that growers would be looking for during an in-person field day.

“None of us are professional videographers or actors so there is going to be some rough-

ness to the videos,” she said. “But I think it worked really well.”

One of the main take-away messages from the virtual field days is that the normal agricultural research conducted by UI scientists has not stopped during the pandemic, even though researchers have had to alter how they get the results out to growers, Wilder said.

“We weren’t able to have summer field days but the research is ongoing,” she said. “We’re working closely with the U of I ... to continue projects and work that will help growers. Researchers are being supported and they are continuing their work.”

“The university has given us the OK to continue with our research,” Marshall said. “The information is still available and still being delivered.”

To view UI’s virtual field days online, go to www.uidaho.edu/extension/news/field-day ■



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Nursery fills niche market to supply native plants

By Dianna Troyer

For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

For native plant nursery owners Jim Crawford and Margo Conitz, their autumn office is the great outdoors. In the midst of their seed collection season from late August to November, they manage to have a sense of humor while patiently and painstakingly gathering countless tiny seeds.

“Gotta get some conifer cones before the squirrels get them all,” Conitz jokes. “The fall colors are gorgeous when we’re gathering, but like all our favorite things it doesn’t last long enough.”

Since 1994, companies and government agencies needing native plants to restore habitat have turned to the couple’s business, Twin Peaks Native Plant Nursery south of McCall. They raise native plants of the Intermountain Northwest including perennial wildflowers, wetland and upland grasses, conifers, trees, and shrubs.

“Our plants are used for habitat improvement, mining reclamation, erosion control projects, and campground improvement,” Crawford said. “We’re also a source to landscapers and other nurseries for native plants.”

They strive to match up seed sources, elevations, and soil types to produce plants best adapted to certain sites.

To help their plants absorb nutrients, “we inoculate seedlings with species-appropriate mycorrhizal fungi,” Conitz said. “The plants carry that association into the field, giving them an advantage when planted in harsh sites.”

While native plants have long been used for restoration projects, they are also sought by consumers who want beautiful, drought-tolerant plants in their yards. In some areas, thirsty lawns are being replaced with low-maintenance native perennials.



Photo courtesy of Twin Peaks Native Plant Nursery
To supply a variety of markets, Jim Crawford and Margo Conitz raise native plants at Twin Peaks Native Plant Nursery near McCall.

“Several cities in Utah require residents to grow native plants for landscaping to conserve water,” Crawford said.

In the past few months, they have seen increased interest from government agencies and consumers in plants that attract pollinators.

“Rabbit brush is a late flowering plant, so people like it because it provides flowers for pollinators throughout the fall,” Conitz said. “It doesn’t need a lot of water either.”

The couple recalled their first big project with the nursery shortly after they started it.

“We had a demand for our crop of local native shrubs for fire restoration near McCall,” Conitz said. “Things built from there and we’ve been supplying the native plant market ever since. The Nez Perce Tribe has an office in McCall, and we’ve been working with them on planting projects for quite a few years.”

To keep up with demand, they raise

plants in their 4,000-square-foot climate-controlled greenhouse and a 10,000-square-foot fenced area for large containers. They hire three or four seasonal part-time employees during the spring planting season and during the fall packing season.

During autumn, when they’re not gathering, cleaning and sorting seeds, they ship plants – lodgepole pine, snow buckwheat, spiny hopsage, bitterbrush, sagebrush and countless others.

As they look over the plants in their greenhouse, Conitz said, “It’s gratifying to know our plants are being used for many purposes, especially helping to restore wild areas.”

Crawford said, “We enjoy working with our agency friends on their projects and showing individuals and groups the process of growing plants started from native seed. There are lots of good folks interested in native plants on all levels.” ■

2020 sugar beet crop showing promise

By Bill Schaefer

For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Idaho Sugarbeet Growers Association Executive Director Brad Griff is cautiously optimistic that this year's crop will be better than the 2019 crop.

"Initially we were thinking it was going to be a similar crop to last year but it looks like it's going to be better, so I think it's safe to say we're going to be north of 18 percent sugar across the growing region, which is very good. It's what our growers are always striving for," he said.

Last year's cold snap across Idaho during the first week of October resulted in lower than anticipated sugar content in the sugar beet crop, according to Griff.

"It was a strong enough frost that it shut down all production in the sugar beets," he said.

Griff said that last year's crop averaged 17.7 percent sugar content.

The ISGA represents about 540 members from five Idaho grower associations.

Randall Grant, president of the ISGA board of directors, said that this year's growing season started out with a little rough patch during spring planting but the rest of the growing year has been good.

"Spring was a little tough, a lot of wind and frost early," he said. "We had quite a few replants but once summer got here it was a good, steady, sunny growing summer, just what we need."

Grant seconded Griff's projection of

the 2020 sugar beet harvest.

Grant said the sugar beets are done bulking up and are now increasing their sugar content.

"Cool nights – not really a hard freeze – that causes those beets to produce sugar," Grant said.

Griff said with the recent cool nights they are seeing increasing sugar content in the crop.

It all comes down to the fall weather for sugar beet growers, he said.

"This time of year is really prime time," Griff said. "Up to this point they've been putting on bulk, mass, they've been accumulating tons and that's important, too, but really the sugar is what separates a good crop from an exceptional crop." ■





BACKGROUND: A truck loaded with sugar beets drives up to the scale house under the fading light of day.

RIGHT: A half-dozen trucks wait in line to unload their sugar beets at Amalgamated Sugar's South Pleasant Valley Road sugar beet lot.

FAR RIGHT: A truck driver uses the side-view mirror for directions as he backs his truck to the unloading dock.

TOP: A sugar beet defoliator cuts off the foliage while a sugar beet harvester loads a truck in the background.



Photos by Bill Schaefer



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