

# GEM STATE **Producer** Idaho Farm Bureau

September 2019 • Volume 23 Issue 6

**Governor Little  
discusses  
agriculture with  
Farm Bureau**



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## Bringing species protection into the 21st century



The Trump Administration has done what Congress or any previous presidential administration couldn't or wouldn't: modernize federal agency processes under the 46-year-old Endangered Species Act.

On Aug. 12, Interior Secretary David Bernhardt announced three new rules to ensure that the ESA better fulfills the purpose of species recovery, while making the law work better for landowners.

These improvements matter because ESA restrictions hinder farming and ranching — some-

thing that's understandable when it truly is needed to benefit a species. However, it's extremely frustrating when the farmer or rancher knows the restrictions will do little for the critters they're supposed to help, or when species remain on the endangered list long after the land is crawling with them.

One of the reforms announced this week eliminates the so-called blanket 4(d) rule that treated many species classified as threatened (at risk of becoming endangered) the same as those classified

See **DUVALL**, page 6

## The President's Desk

By Bryan Searle

President Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

## Farmers should weigh in on proposed H-2A changes



As I think back on my childhood and growing up on the farm, I remember that when I was doing jobs like carrying a shovel to irrigate or moving hand pipe, milking cows or working in the harvest, it was alongside many high school boys or others in the community.

Today on our farm, we don't receive many calls from people willing to do those jobs like we did in the past, when many farmers were able to find family members or locals to help out on the farm. These are hard and dirty jobs with long hours and they need to be done daily.

The dynamics of farming have changed to the point there is a dire need for people willing to do these jobs who are not just interested in getting a paycheck while doing the least amount of work as possible.

That has created a bigger need for a workable guest worker program.

One option to this scarcity of available and willing workers is the use of a federal agricultural guest worker program called H-2A. We have personally used the H-2A program for over 25 years

See **SEARLE**, page 7

## Inside Farm Bureau

By Rick Keller

CEO Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

## When is renewable energy actually renewable?



As reported by the U.S. Energy Information Administration, 82 percent of Idaho's in-state electricity generation comes from renewable energy resources, with 60 percent supplied from hydroelectric power.

The same 2017 study reported renewable resources accounted for a larger share of net electricity generation in Idaho than in any other state except Vermont. Idaho has the sixth-lowest average electricity prices in the United States.

Idaho is to be commended in its renewable energy commitment. The commitment does not

come from a top-down, government-regulated standard. It is being completed within the private marketplace. In fact, the largest provider of electricity in Idaho, Idaho Power, recently announced that by 2045, it will operate its grid entirely on clean energy.

Nearly half of the states have created a state renewable portfolio standard (RPS) mandating upon their citizens and businesses its drive for renewable energy. Nearly every state's RPS is way below what Idaho currently offers.

See **KELLER**, page 6



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American Farm Bureau Federation photo  
From right to left, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President Bryan Searle, U.S. Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt, Arizona Farm Bureau Federation President Stefanie Smallhouse and Nevada Farm Bureau Federation President Bevan Lister are shown at a signing ceremony Aug. 12 where the Department of Interior announced changes in how the Endangered Species Act is implemented.

# Department of Interior announces ESA revisions

By Sean Ellis  
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Department of Interior on Aug. 12 announced changes in how the Endangered Species Act is implemented.

American Farm Bureau Federation and Idaho Farm Bureau Federation policy has for years supported changes in the ESA that make it less burdensome on landowners while continuing to protect listed species.

According to the Interior Department, the changes are designed to better promote species recovery while at the same time easing the act's regulatory burdens on Americans.

IFBF President Bryan Searle was one of three state Farm Bureau presidents invited to a Department of Interior signing ceremony Aug. 12 where the changes were officially announced.

Searle called the signing ceremony a historic event.

"These are good, common-sense changes that will result in the Endangered Species Act being less burdensome on private landowners," he said. "There was a lot of enthusiasm at the signing event, and

See ESA, page 8

Photo by Sean Ellis

**ON THE COVER: Gov. Brad Little speaks with Idaho Farm Bureau Federation about agriculture-related issues Aug. 2. See story on page 10**



Photo by John O'Connell

Kelby Nelson, manager of Snake River Robotics, leads a tour of Heglar Creek Dairy in Declo, where water is automatically dispensed to clean a stall.

# Automation keeps production humming at Declo dairy

**By John O'Connell**  
*Intermountain Farm and Ranch*

DECLO — The cows at Heglar Creek Dairy live indoors and receive constant care, though the facility is sparsely staffed at any given time.

Heglar Creek, which now milks 720 cows, opened in December 2018 and is designed to be operated with less than half the usual labor force thanks to assistance from robots.

The robots also identify sick animals and issue medical notations for the staff

veterinarian. Sick cows are automatically directed into a special holding pen.

Twelve of 18 planned robots are already operational, each capable of milking 60 cows three times per day on average. Once the equipment is fully installed, it will have the capacity for

milking 1,080 cows.

Heglar Creek is one of roughly a half dozen robotic dairies that have opened in the state since the first facility went live in Elba in 2015. The partners in the new, high-tech operation have already discovered there are some areas in which people can't compare with machines.

In addition to the labor savings, Todd Webb, who runs the dairy with his two brothers and one neighbor, estimates Heglar Creek also benefits from 15 to 20 percent fewer culls, 5 to 8 percent better pregnancy rates and at least a 20 percent improvement in productivity.

"I think we're feeling pretty good about it," Webb said. "We're in a world where everything is changing and efficiency is key to being able to stay in production, and that is what the robotics is all about."

The facility's ventilation, humidity and temperature automatically adjust to optimal levels, keeping the cows comfortable during the extreme heat of summer and chill of winter. About 90 massive ceiling fans pull fresh air into the building.

Robots push feed back toward pens, making it accessible after the cows push much of the pile beyond their reach while feeding. Robotic systems routinely scrape manure and separate the solids for composting. Water is automatically flushed through pens at regular intervals to clean them.

Cows all wear a radio-frequency ID collar, logging details about eating

habits, activity, rumination and visits to the robot.

"It's like a Fitbit for cows," Webb said.

The system also records information such as whether or not a cow is pregnant, the calf's due date, lactation cycle and feeding history and adjusts rations accordingly. A network of small discs moves feed through a system of 2-inch tubes.

"(The system) will build an individual table for each cow, and as she increases in milk, it will give her more feed. As she decreases in milk, it will give her less feed," said Kelby Nelson, manager of Heyburn-based Snake River Robotics, which services and installs Lely brand dairy robots.

Nelson also designed the layout of Heglar Creek.

Cows' udders are laser scanned for composition. When a cow enters the automated milking station, a robotic arm brushes the teats to clean them and stimulate milk. A laser locates the teats, and milking equipment attaches to them.

"The robot will continue to learn," Nelson said.

When a cow enters a robotic milking unit, the system can monitor for about 100 different parameters regarding the health of the animal and the quality of the milk.

For example, if the cow has mastitis and has traces of blood in its milk — unrecognizable to the naked eye — an infrared scanner will detect the problem and dump the milk down a drain.

Typically, the machine opens a gate to

return the cow to the general herd once milking is finished. A separate gate is opened for sick animals, diverting them into the medical pen.

"The robot is a great management tool. It can sort my cows. It can tell me when it is pregnant, when a cow might need to be culled and when she's sick," Nelson said.

Nelson believes the comfortable climate, the ability to milk cows more often and reduced stress on the animals leads to a sizable increase in production.

Webb has also noticed that the reduction in injuries and immediate attention to the medical needs of cows has significantly reduced culls.

Webb believes he's achieved even greater efficiencies because he operates a conventional dairy across the street from Heglar Creek. It saves on staffing, as crews from the conventional dairy can also tend to the robotic dairy.

Furthermore, cows that don't train well to the machines or don't have appropriate udder composition can be moved to the conventional dairy.

"I think they actually marry together quite well," Webb said, of running both a conventional and robotic dairy.

Webb said the robots, which have been used for several years in other countries, have proven to have at least a 20-year life expectancy.

Components must be replaced periodically, but Webb said some dairy owners have found old machinery can perform better than new, thanks to periodic software updates. ■

## Top Farm Bureau Agents

Agent of the Month



**Kendon Perry,**  
Bonner County

Rookie of the Month



**Bailey Stetzen,**  
Cassia County

Region of the Month



**North Idaho**  
**Ben Rae,**  
Regional Executive

*Continued from page 2*

Idaho utilities have had to seek renewables primarily because the state has so few fossil fuel resources.

Hydroelectric power is the world's largest electricity generator, producing a "renewable" energy source. A renewable, clean energy source should be easy to identify. If the source cannot be depleted and produces zero greenhouse gases, it should meet the standard definition of "clean and renewable."

And yet, many state RPS's discount and do not count hydroelectric power as renewable.

In irony, these same states' RPS's identify energy from wind and solar farms as renewable. In a recent Wall Street Journal article by Mark P. Mills, the author contends, "Renewable energy is a misnomer."

He cites that building one wind turbine requires 900 tons of steel, 2,500 tons of concrete and 45 tons of nonrecyclable plastic.

He also reports the International Renewable Energy Agency calculates that solar goals for 2050 consistent with the Paris Accord will result in old-panel disposal constituting more than double the tonnage of all today's global plastic waste.

Hardly a renewable.

Mills also wrote that a single electric-car battery weighs about 1,000 pounds. Fabricating one requires digging up and moving and processing more than 500,000 pounds of raw material somewhere on the planet.

Perhaps the cleanest, non-fossil-based power, is nuclear. In Eastern Idaho at the Idaho National Laboratory, small modular reactors are being developed and will be the first such reactors in the country, known as Carbon Free Power Project.

Idaho's utilities are considering partnering with INL in providing this clean energy to their customers.

We need not get involved in the semantics of what is renewable or not.

What we need is clean and renewable energy. Idaho is a leader in renewable clean energy. It is who we are. It is in our history. We will continue to do so because it is right and feasible, not because of some government or entity is dictating to us.

Private and public providers are listening to the people. It is one reason why we relish living in the Gem State. ■

*Continued from page 2*

as endangered. If those categories are treated the same, what's the use of having separate classifications?

Going forward, the Fish and Wildlife Service will write species-specific rules concerning how best to help threatened species thrive.

Another rule ensures that delisting or reclassifying a species is based on the same factors that determine whether to list a species in the first place. Making all listing decisions on the basis of consistent criteria will help to direct resources to species in need by not expending them on species that already have recovered.

The rule also ensures that listing decisions are based on the best available science, consistent with the law.

Finally, this rule fixes something that really gets in the landowner's craw: designating critical habitat where species do not exist, and possibly never have. This has been a real head-scratcher for many farmers and ranchers—a perfect example of regulations that don't make sense and don't work.

Now, areas where threatened and endangered species are present will be up for critical habitat designation before unoccupied areas, and unoccupied areas will have to contain at least one physical or biological feature that's essential to the species' conservation.

That just makes sense! As someone whose hairline is endangered, I'm glad I don't have to scratch my head over that one any more.

A third rule will make the consultation process between federal agencies more efficient, and it sets a deadline for some consultations.

It might be difficult to get excited about a change to a government process, but let me tell you this is huge: it means there could be quicker approvals for new pest management tools, for example, if the process for the Environmental Protection Agency to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service or the National Marine Fisheries Service is more timely.

Some will predictably claim that these reforms "weaken" the ESA and species protection, and they will be wrong. When I see a way to make my farm more efficient, it strengthens my farm.

Any business would update a 46-year-old process to make it work better. The Interior Department is bringing ESA rules into the 21st century and making improvements based on lessons learned over decades of working to conserve and recover species.

Leaders of several agricultural organizations, including Farm Bureau, were on hand for the announcement. It has been refreshing for those who are most affected by federal actions to be consulted and heard when those actions are considered and announced.

This announcement of ESA reforms adds to a growing list of regulatory reform achievements that improve our ability to farm and ranch and keep food on America's tables.

We've worked for decades to help government leaders understand that ESA implementation and bureaucratic red tape had strayed far beyond common sense or the original intent of the law. We applaud the president and Secretary Bernhardt for these much-needed improvements. ■

Continued from page 2

and have experienced the many regulations and costly challenges associated with the program.

The U.S. Department of Labor has proposed a rule that would modify the H-2A program and it's important for farmers and ranchers to weigh in on the rule, which is designed to streamline and simplify the H-2A application process.

The federal H-2A program allows agricultural producers who can't find enough domestic workers to bring in foreign guest workers to fill jobs on a temporary or seasonal basis.

As labor availability has reached a crisis point in some areas of farm country, the number of producers that use H-2A workers has grown significantly in recent years. According to DOL data, a total of 85,248 H-2A positions were certified nationally in fiscal year 2012 and that number jumped to 242,762 in fiscal 2018.

Idaho's H-2A growth rate has followed a similar pattern.

According to the Idaho Department of Labor, 5,367 H-2A positions were certified in Idaho in fiscal 2018, up from 4,615 in fiscal 2017.

Many farmers and ranchers in Idaho and around the nation have for years struggled to find enough workers and more producers are turning to the H-2A program.

While the program provides a valuable lifeline to those producers who simply cannot find enough domestic workers, those who use it say the application process is burdensome and the program is expensive to use.

The revisions in the program proposed by the DOL seek to ease some of that burden. If the changes do streamline the application process and reduce administrative costs, that would be a big benefit to employers who use the program.

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue said the proposed rule "will increase access to a reliable legal agricultural workforce, easing unnecessary burdens on farmers, increase enforcement against fraud and abuse, all while maintaining protections for America's workers."

When the rule goes into effect, he added, "our farmers will be released from unnecessary and burdensome regulations, allowing them to do what they do best."

Among other things, the rule allows for post-certification amendments regarding number of workers, the work period and places of work.

It includes modifications in the housing and transportation requirements that employers face when hiring H-2A workers.

For example, instead of annual housing inspections, the new rule proposes multi-year inspections, with the employer conducting a self-inspection and certification in the second year.

It would allow employers to stagger the arrival of workers.

The rule also proposes to change how the minimum wage H-2A workers must be paid is calculated. DOL is also requesting comments on all elements of the methodology used to determine this rate, which varies by state.


This minimum wage, known as the H-2A "adverse effect wage rate," is mandated by the federal government. This year, Idaho's AEWR rate increased 16 percent, from \$11.63 in 2018 to \$13.48.

A 16 percent increase in labor costs in an already struggling agricultural industry represents a major challenge to any farming operation and any change in the methodology used to determine the AEWR rate that more accurately reflects reality is certainly welcomed.

The DOL does not have the statutory authority to expand the H-2A program to make it a year-round program but the rule does invite comments on how year-round agriculture may be able to use the program.

A 60-day public comment period on the proposed rule ends Sept. 24. It's important for farmers and ranchers to weigh in on these proposed changes.

To comment on the proposed changes, visit [https://www.regulations.gov/comment?D=WHDFRDOC\\_0001-0070](https://www.regulations.gov/comment?D=WHDFRDOC_0001-0070) ■

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*Continued from page 3*

applause. It was a great day.”

“Today’s Endangered Species Act reforms serve the needs of imperiled species as well as the people most affected by implementation of the law’s provisions,” said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. “This makes real-world species recovery more likely as a result.”

The majority of the habitat that listed species need to survive is located on private land and the changes allow greater flexibility for private landowners to be more creative in assisting in species recovery.

The new regulations encourage and make it easier for private landowners, as well as states, to invest in conservation actions.

Since the ESA was enacted by Congress in 1973, less than 2 percent of listed species have been recovered and delisted.

While the act has had a less than stellar history when it comes to actually recovering species, it has resulted in a lot of pain and bureaucratic nightmares for many Americans who have had to wade through its burdensome and sometimes unrealistic regulations, Searle said.

“The changes to the ESA will not only ease the act’s burdens on the public but they will also help in achieving the act’s ultimate goal: the recovery of threatened or endangered animals and plants,” he said.

The changes announced Aug. 12 apply to sections 4 and 7 of the ESA and deal with adding species to or removing them from the act’s protections, the designation of critical habitat, and consultation with federal agencies

The new regulations restore the distinction between threatened and endangered species and clarify when a species should be removed from the endangered or threatened list, which will encourage private parties to engage in private conservation actions.

Duvall said the new regulations restore the traditional distinction between threatened and endangered species.

“That’s important,” he said. “In the real world, the things we must do to restore a threatened species are not always the same as the ones we’d use for endangered species.



American Farm Bureau Federation photo  
**Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President Bryan Searle, sixth from left, watches as U.S. Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt announces revisions to the Endangered Species Act Aug. 12 during a signing ceremony in Washington, D.C.**

This approach will eliminate unnecessary time and expense and ease the burden on farmers and ranchers who want to help species recover.”

Duvall said the changes will simplify environmental review and interagency consultations and provide much-needed consistency in the listing and delisting process.

“Keeping species on the endangered list when they no longer face the threat of extinction takes valuable resources away from species that still need ongoing protection under the ESA ... Farm Bureau welcomes all of these changes,” he said.

There is potential regulatory relief when a species is downlisted from endangered to threatened and the changes allow for private, state and local entities to undertake conservation actions that allow for that downlisting to occur.

The changes include specially tailored regulations for threatened species that are designed to expedite conservation measures by exempting them from permitting requirements.

The changes also streamline the environmental review process.

“The act’s effectiveness rests on clear, consistent and efficient implementation,” U.S. Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt said during the signing ceremony. “An effectively administered act ensures more resources can go where they will do the most good: on-the-ground conservation.”

“The revisions finalized with this rulemaking fit squarely within the president’s

mandate of easing the regulatory burden on the American public, without sacrificing our species’ protection and recovery goals,” said U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross. “These changes were subject to a robust, transparent public process, during which we received significant public input that helped us finalize these rules.”

According to a DOI news release, the ESA prohibits agencies from making listing determinations based on anything but the best available scientific and commercial information and those will remain the only criteria on which listing determinations will be made.

According to the DOI news release, while the department recognizes the value of critical habitat as a conservation tool, “in some cases, designation of critical habitat is not prudent. Revisions to the regulations identify a non-exhaustive list of such circumstances, but this will continue to be rare exceptions.”

The new regulations also reinstate the requirement that when designating critical habitat, areas where threatened or endangered species are present at the time of listing be evaluated first before unoccupied areas are considered.

“This reduces the potential for additional regulatory burden that results from a designation when species are not present in an area,” the DOI news release states. “In addition, the regulations impose a heightened standard for unoccupied areas to be designated as critical habitat.” ■



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# Governor talks with Farm Bureau about Idaho agriculture

By Sean Ellis  
*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

EMMETT – Gov. Brad Little’s effort to simplify and reduce Idaho rules and regulations could have a big impact on the state’s agricultural industry.

Like other state agencies, the Idaho State Department of Agriculture is significantly reducing its rules and regulations, Little told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation Aug. 2 during a wide-ranging interview at his ranch and farm near Emmett.

During the 40-minute interview, Little also answered questions about hemp, wolves, the use of technology in agriculture, trade disputes, transportation and education.

Little’s goal is to cut or simplify 55-60 percent of all of Idaho’s rules.

According to the governor, this will reduce regulatory burdens on Idaho citizens and businesses, make the state’s regulations easier for the public to understand and navigate, and promote economic opportunities by governing with the lightest possible hand.

“The whole rules process is going to be a lot better,” said Little, Idaho’s 33rd governor and a rancher and farmer. “The big deal on all the rules is that for the regular guy, he’s going to be able to read them easier and they’re going to be easier to find.”

When it comes to state agencies’ efforts to simplify or reduce their rules, “I think the (ISDA) might be one of the top performers,” he added. “I think the department of agriculture may get rid of more rules or simplify ... more rules than any other agency. It’s going to be easier in all these different areas to do what you have to do to comply with the law.”

Little said he has received a lot of feed-

Photo by Sean Ellis  
Gov. Brad Little is shown Aug. 2 at his ranch near Emmett, where he answered questions about agriculture during a wide-ranging interview with Idaho Farm Bureau Federation.

back on his effort to reduce rules and regulations, most of it positive.

“They like my emphasis on significantly cutting rules and regulations,” he said.

A native of Emmett, Little, 65, was raised on his family sheep and cattle ranch and he has been involved in the state’s ranching and agricultural industry his entire life.

“I can remember shearing sheep about four miles from where we’re standing right now,” the governor said, explaining that his earlier memories revolve around ranching.

The governor’s thoughts during the interview quickly turned to the current condition of agriculture in Idaho and challenges and opportunities the industry faces.

He said the current trade disputes with some of the nation’s largest agricultural trading partners is one of the biggest challenges Idaho and U.S. farmers currently face.

He said getting the revamped NAFTA deal ratified and in effect would go a long way toward helping provide needed certainty for U.S. farmers and ranchers.

The proposed new NAFTA, known as the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, was announced last year but still needs to be ratified by Congress.

Little said Idaho’s congressional delegation solidly supports USMCA. Canada and Mexico are the top two destinations for Idaho agricultural exports.

“I just think that’s a huge priority for agriculture,” Little said. “Our congressional delegation is all in but all of our farming and ranching friends need to reach out to their members in other states to put pressure on (Congress) to have a vote on USMCA. We need the stability. We need to know what our rules are with our biggest trading partners.”

Idaho is one of the fastest-growing states and the governor said that educating newcomers about agriculture’s importance to the state’s economy is an ongoing challenge. According to a University of Idaho study, agriculture is the top sector of the state’s economy.

Little said economic development to

ensure there are enough jobs for Idahoans, particularly in rural parts of the state, is one of his top priorities.

“I don’t want to export our children out of Idaho. We need to have jobs” for them, he said.

Making sure Idaho’s children are well-educated and trained is critical to preparing them for a job market that is quickly being transformed by technology, Little said. That means continuing to invest in education, he added.

“The most important thing we do – it’s in our constitution, it’s our moral obligation – is educate our kids,” Little said. “We have to have opportunities for them to go onto college if they want to do that or have a pathway to career technical (training).”

Adding value to the farm products produced in Idaho is a top priority for the state’s agricultural community because Idaho is challenged geographically, Little said.

“It’s hard to get our commodities elsewhere so it’s very important to me that we add as much value as we can to the commodities we produce here,” he said.

Every time value is added to a commodity produced in Idaho, Little said, “it creates job opportunities and means that farmers ... are closer to the ultimate consumer because if we can haul them the finished product and save all the money in transportation costs and create all that money here, that is a benefit to the farmers.”

To bring Idaho farm products closer to the consumer, Little said, it’s important to continue to invest in the state’s transportation infrastructure, which includes roads and bridges, rail and the Port of Lewiston.

“From an agricultural standpoint, a good (transportation system) is important to moving farmland closer to the ultimate consumers,” he said. “We produce a lot of commodities in Idaho and we don’t consume very much of them in Idaho, so we have to be able to move them out of here. Transportation is critical in Idaho.”

Little also said that the effort to marry the state’s agriculture and technology sectors, started in 2015 by former Idaho

Department of Commerce Director Jeff Sayer, is still alive and ag innovation is taking place all over the state’s farming and ranching sectors.

“Actually, it’s on steroids,” he said of the so-called ag-tech movement that Sayer pushed. “The people that survive in this business are people that work hard and innovate.”

When it comes to hemp production, Little said he has no problem with growing and processing that commodity in Idaho as long as it’s not used as a way to camouflage marijuana.

The 2018 Farm Bill, which went into effect last December, for the first time legalizes the commercial growing and processing of hemp in the United States. But the act leaves it up to each state to adopt a policy on hemp and the Idaho Legislature this year failed to enact legislation addressing hemp production.

Idaho is now one of three states with a blanket ban on hemp and Gem State supporters of that commodity say the state’s farmers will fall further behind the hemp market the longer Idaho fails to adopt a hemp policy.

“We will have a policy on hemp in Idaho,” Little said. “I have no issues with hemp as long as it’s not camouflage for recreational marijuana.”

Little also addressed the hot-topic issue of wolves and was asked about his decision during his first year in office to recommend \$200,000 in state funding for the Idaho Wolf Control Board, which is tasked with funding lethal control of problem wolves.

Since the board was created in 2014, it has received \$400,000 in state funds annually, as well as \$110,000 annually from the state’s livestock industry and \$110,000 from Idaho sportsmen.

This year was the first time the board didn’t receive \$400,000 in state funding.

Little said he recommended \$200,000 for the wolf board in fiscal year 2020 because the board had built up a surplus and he wanted that money to be used first before recommending additional funding.

“They weren’t spending all the money they had,” Little said. “There’s no use in a state agency building up a big surplus.



Photo by Marissa Morrison

**Gov. Brad Little speaks with Idaho Farm Bureau Federation Aug. 2 at his ranch near Emmett.**

If we are going to amass a war chest, it ought to be for the whole state of Idaho.”

He also said people don’t need to worry about the board not receiving enough state funding in the future. “They’ll have the resources they need,” he said.

Little told IFBF members earlier this year not to worry about where he stands on wolves because he fully understands the impact they are having on livestock and wildlife.

“Fish and game is doing a pretty good

job of managing (wolves) but believe me, I talk to ranchers all over the state ... and there are areas where they are causing huge problems,” he said during the Aug. 2 interview.

He also said that in some areas of the state, wolves are pushing wildlife down onto farms and ranches, causing those producers to suffer significant depredation losses.

Wrapping up the interview, Little was asked to share some words of wisdom from his late father, David Little, who

served in the Idaho Senate.

He said his father shared quite a few nuggets of wisdom.

“One of them was, ‘If you’re going to spend the public’s money, you have to spend it like you’re spending your own,’” Little said.

Another one: “Doing things in the public forum because you’re mad at somebody is bad policy. You have to get over that. He had a pretty good reputation for getting along with everybody and I learned a lot from that.” ■

# Wheat is top crop in PNW (Idaho, Oregon, Washington)

By Sean Ellis

*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

POCATELLO – Idaho is famous for its iconic potatoes, Washington is known for producing a whole lot of apples and Oregon is well known for its nursery crops.

But when you combine the three Pacific Northwest states, wheat is the top crop, at least when it comes to total acres.

“Although potatoes may be No. 1 in Idaho and apples No. 1 in Washington, the PNW is really wheat country,” said Idaho Wheat Commission Executive Director Blaine Jacobson. “When a broad look is taken at the three PNW states, wheat is the top ... crop.”

Data provided by employees at USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service’s regional office in Olympia, Wash., shows that farmers in the three states harvested a combined 4.07 million acres of wheat in 2018.

That’s well ahead of the 3.2 million acres of hay and haylage that was harvested. Barley ranked No. 3 in acres in the PNW with 623,000, followed by corn (not including sweet corn) at 599,000 and potatoes at 526,000.

Given those numbers, the PNW should be most famous for its wheat, said Jacobson, who has also compiled a list of infrastructure that supports the three states’ wheat industries.

In addition to eight wheat breeding programs, there are seven wheat breeders in the three states, two wheat geneticists and about seven dozen people work full-time on those wheat breeding teams.

The PNW also has five wheat quality labs, 50 wheat nurseries, more than 35,000 square feet of greenhouse space and about 100,000 wheat test plots.

The industry is also supported by the



Photo by Sean Ellis

**Wheat is harvested in a southwestern Idaho field in 2018. Wheat is the top crop in the Pacific Northwest if you combine Idaho, Oregon and Washington.**

PNW Wheat Quality Council, the National Small Grains Collection, USDA’s Agricultural Research Service Wheat Genomics Program and the Wheat Marketing Center.

IWC Commissioner Jerry Brown, a wheat farmer in the Soda Springs area, said Idaho’s wheat industry leaders make it a point of showing that acreage data and list of wheat infrastructure to members of foreign trade teams that visit the region.

He said providing that information shows them the region is committed to growing quality wheat.

“We try real hard to show them the in-

frastructure, breeding programs and the farms that grow the wheat,” Brown said. “We really tout that to them.”

The PNW region is known for producing a quality wheat crop year in and year out and that enables the three states’ wheat farmers to remain competitive in a global market, said IWC Commissioner and North Idaho farmer Bill Flory.

The three states’ combined commitment to the wheat industry enables that to happen, he said.

“Our customers need consistency of final product, which means consistency of wheat and we have provided them

See **WHEAT**, page 16



Photo by Sean Ellis

Teton County residents learn about a stream bank restoration project Aug. 8 during the Teton Farm & Agricultural Tour.

# Better Together

## Farmers, conservation groups work together in Teton County

By Sean Ellis  
*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

DRIGGS – Groups in Teton County are proving that agriculture and conservation don't have to be competing ideas.

On Aug. 8, those groups sponsored an agricultural tour to show community members how farmers, ranchers and conservation groups are working together on natural-re-

source related projects that benefit the soil and water.

“Ag producers here are farming and ranching in a way that improves soil health ... and improves water quality and quantity,” said Amy Verbeten, executive director of Friends of the Teton River. “The purpose of this tour is to help our community understand the value that our agricultural producers bring to this community.”

About 100 people attended the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Teton Farm & Agricultural Tour, which was sponsored by several groups, including Teton County Farm Bureau, Friends of the Teton River, Teton County Soil Conservation District, Teton Regional Land Trust and local farms and ranches.

The five-hour bus tour was held to highlight the work local farmers, ranchers and conservation groups are doing to benefit the

health of the Teton Valley's ag lands, community and ecosystem.

More than 50 percent of the land in the Teton Valley is in agricultural production and the presence of the Teton River has resulted in a strong fishing and recreation industry that brings millions of tourism dollars to the area.

Verbeten said some people have fallen into a faulty way of thinking that agriculture, conservation and recreation are competing economies and if one was strong, the others had to be weak.

"What we're finding here and proving in Teton Valley is that that's not true at all," she said. "We're finding that these industries can actually be stronger when we work together. We're finding that agriculture can bring great value to our community and make our water and soil and way of life better."

Teton County Farm Bureau President Stephen Bagley, a rancher and farmer, said farm and conservation groups in the valley had fought each other in the past with very little communication.

As the tour demonstrates, "we can at least get a dialogue opened up between individuals in the community from the agriculture, conservation and recreation communities. If we can understand each other just a little bit more, that is a huge benefit in my mind."

"We do not agree on everything 100 percent but we have definitely found some common ground and that's been wonderful to see," Bagley said.

One example of how the parties are working together is a voluntary aquifer recharge program that has resulted in more groundwater returning to the Teton River during the critical late summer months, when both fish and farmers desperately need it.

Sixteen canal and irrigation companies in the valley now participate in that program, up from two last year.

The aquifer recharge program has in particular been a big benefit to conservationists and ag producers, Verbeten said. "We're seeing cleaner, colder water than ever before, and more fish."

The groups support a soil health initiative and were able to purchase a no-till drill that is owned by the soil conservation district and rented to agricultural producers.

The groups are also supporting a project experimenting with cover crops and differ-



Photo by Sean Ellis

**Teton County residents visit a farm Aug. 8 during the Teton Farm & Agricultural Tour, which showed community members how farmers, ranchers and conservation groups are working together on natural-resource related projects that benefit the soil and water.**

ent crop rotations to create healthy soil and prevent erosion into the river. Friends of the Teton River is financially supporting a position that works with producers to measure and document soil health changes on their farms.

Verbeten said the conservation groups bring strong fundraising and grant writing experience to the table and farmers and ranchers bring a tremendous amount of expertise in innovative agricultural best management practices.

The Teton Regional Land Trust offers farmers and ranchers voluntary farmland conservation easements that benefit both producers and the land and water. Farmers are offered a financial incentive to enter into an easement agreement, which is in perpetuity and prevents the land from being developed but allows producers to continue to farm it.

A farmer who enters into this type of agreement can still sell the land but it must remain in agricultural production.

Verbeten said that from her group's perspective, it's far better from a conservation perspective to have that land remain in farming rather than being turned into subdivisions or commercial properties.

"We have far greater concerns about water quality and quantity and about wildlife habitat with development than we do when we have these amazing, conservation-minded producers operating on this landscape," she said.

When the groups first started actively talking to each other about six years ago,

"they started to realize that agriculturalists and conservationists have far more in common than we have differences," Verbeten said. "But that only really happens when you take the time to sit down and listen to each other, to get to know your neighbor and to ask questions."

She said Friends of the Teton River was thrilled to begin working with farmers and ranchers on projects that benefit both.

"We can do so much more together than we could when we were trying to fight each other," she said. "When you fight, somebody's got to lose. And in my mind, when you do that, everybody ends up losing at some point. But when we work together, truly everybody can win. We can all come out better than we were before and I really think we're proving that here in Teton Valley."

Tyrel Bingham, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation's regional manager in the Upper Snake River Valley, applauded TCFB and conservation groups for working together.

"They have been able to work together on issues and move forward on projects, which is something this community has not been able to accomplish in the past," he said. "In this experience, we have learned we want to accomplish a lot of the same things and by informing and educating each other, we have been able to find common ground and work on issues together. The conservation groups have come to have more of an understanding that good agricultural practices are a major benefit to their causes rather than obstacles." ■

# COUNTY HAPPENINGS



Left to right: 1st place, Jaxyn Wheatley; 2nd place, Brailey Henderson; 3rd place, Journey Schiess; 4th place, Oakley Paul; 5th place, Paizley Crouch. The Bannock County Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers invited all who showed animals (beef, pigs, sheep, goats and horses) at the Bannock County Fair in either 4-H or FFA participate in our scholarship. The YF&R group awarded scholarships to help offset the cost of showing their animals. From a group of written essays, these five young ladies advanced to an interview round where they were placed 1st to 5th. (\$300 for 1st; \$200 for 2nd; \$100 for 3rd and \$50 for 4th and 5th places).

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## WHEAT

*Continued from page 13*

that on a regular basis for a long time,” he said. “Quality keeps us in those markets.”

Flory also pointed out that most of the wheat-related infrastructure in the PNW is supported by grower dollars and not federal funds.

“They are grower checkoff dollars that are supporting those programs, with tremendous and consistent results year after year,” he said. “When you spend (growers’) money, you need results. That list of infrastructure is a great example of results.”

While the PNW is a good place to grow wheat, the commitment by the three states’ wheat industries to breeding and variety development programs is the key ingredient that allows Idaho, Oregon and Washington farmers to produce quality wheat crops annually, said Steve Wirsching, vice president and director of U.S. Wheat Associate’s West Coast office in Portland.

“That quality is not an accident at all,” he said. “It’s the outcome of all the efforts of the tri-state wheat commissions and the rest of the industry. Idaho, Oregon and Washington wheat growers all invest significant amounts of money into their states’ breeding programs.” ■



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# HEMP outlook uncertain

## Is there a path forward for growing hemp in Idaho?

By Sean Ellis

*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

POCATELLO – Hemp was a major topic during Idaho’s 2019 legislative session, which adjourned in April, and dozens of people testified on two hemp-related bills.

Most of those who testified during public hearings were in favor of allowing Idaho farmers to grow, process and market hemp, something that is now legal because of the 2018 farm bill, which was signed into law in December.

However, while the farm bill for the first time classified industrial hemp as a regular agricultural crop, it also left it up to each state to develop its own hemp plan.

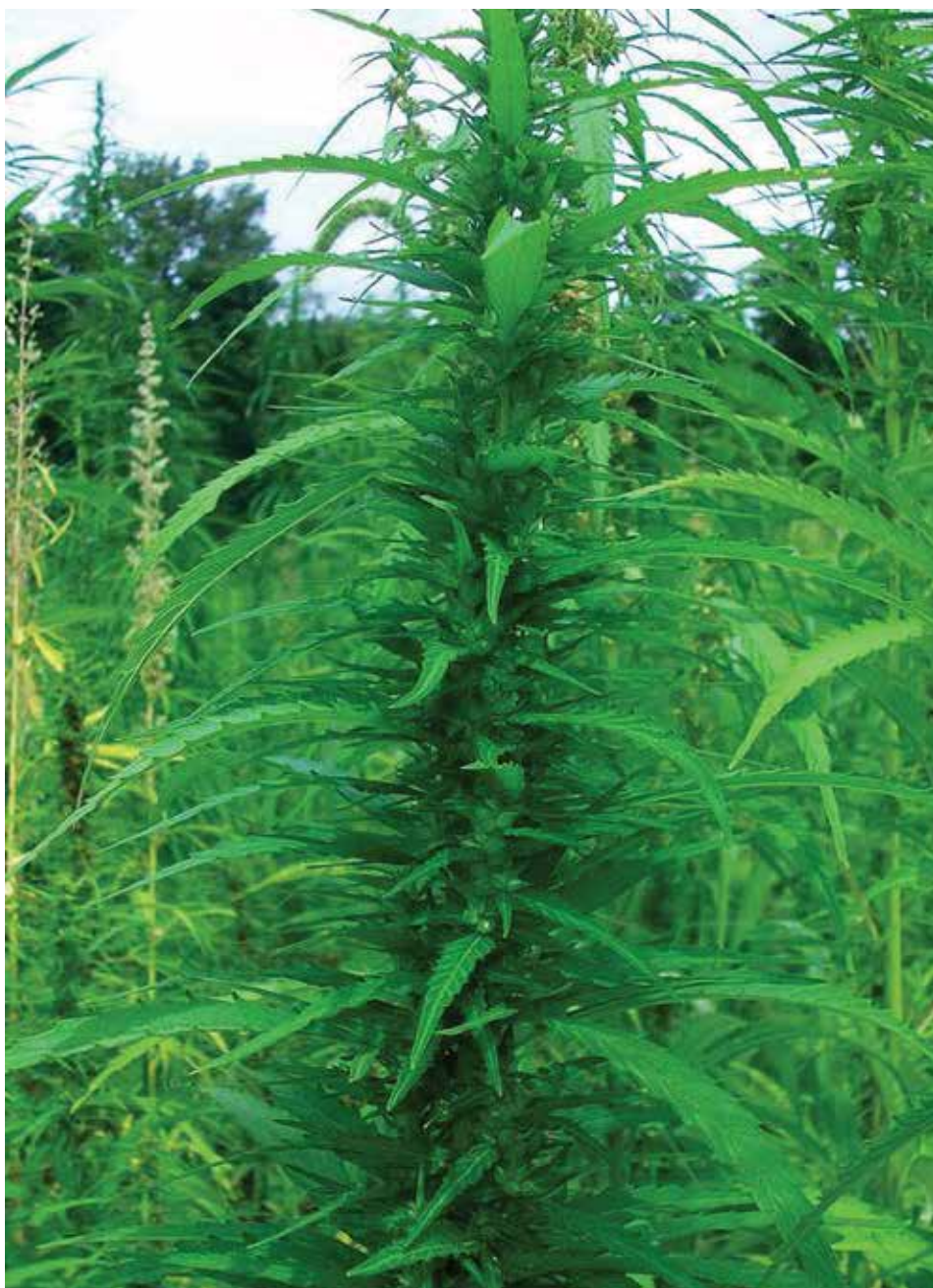
During the 2019 Idaho Legislature, two hemp bills and a House resolution in support of hemp production were introduced. All three failed, the victim of fierce opposition from law enforcement and what some lawmakers said was acrimony on the issue between the House and Senate.

Sen. Mark Harris, a Republican rancher from Soda Springs, said he heard from a lot of farmers who are interested in possibly growing hemp in Idaho but the bills that would have set the stage for that “fell prey to gamesmanship in the legislature.”

So as of right now, it is still illegal to grow and process hemp in Idaho.

While hemp plants are the same species as marijuana, industrial hemp as defined by the farm bill must contain less than 0.3 percent of THC, which is the psychoactive compound that gets marijuana users high. Marijuana has a THC content ranging from about 10 to 25 percent and according to experts, it is virtually impossible to get high from industrial hemp.

Most of the dozens of people who testified on Idaho’s hemp legislation this



National Hemp Association photo  
Hemp plants are shown in this photo provided by the National Hemp Association.



National Hemp Association photo

Hemp plants are shown in this photo provided by the National Hemp Association.

year said it could be a lucrative crop for many farmers or at least give Idaho producers an alternative crop to fit into their rotations, increasing their crop diversity and income potential.

But following the legislative session, Idaho is exactly where it was before the session began in January: It's still illegal to grow hemp in Idaho or possess hemp with any level of THC.

The federal provisions on hemp contained in the farm bill do not change Idaho's definition of it. Under Idaho's controlled substances act, hemp is considered the same thing as marijuana because Idaho code doesn't include a THC threshold.

So a hemp product that has even a small amount of THC is considered the same thing as marijuana in Idaho.

"Idaho's hemp law remains the same as in previous years," said Chanel Tewalt, chief of operations for the Idaho State Department of Agriculture. "Hemp still falls under the definition of marijuana in Idaho."

The hemp regulatory environment is complex, Tewalt said, but when it comes to that commodity in Idaho, the message is simple: "Any commodity with any level of THC is still considered marijuana in Idaho. Anything with any level of THC is not allowed."

She said it's up to state lawmakers to decide what to do with hemp in Idaho but the ISDA has been providing technical information on the issue to people who ask for it.

Rep. Judy Boyle, a Republican rancher from Midvale and chairwoman of the House Agricultural Affairs Committee, said the debate over hemp during the 2019 legislative session turned into a complete wreck.

"It just kept getting worse and worse and worse," she said.

During the session, law enforcement did not budge on its opposition to the hemp-related bills.

The Idaho Sheriff's Association released

a statement saying that legalizing hemp production in Idaho "without proper safeguards in place, is the proverbial camel's nose under the tent with growing marijuana in Idaho."

Gov. Brad Little recently told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation he has no problem with allowing Idaho farmers to grow and process hemp as long as the commodity is not used as a way to disguise marijuana.

"We will have a policy on hemp in Idaho," Little said. "I have no issues with hemp as long as it's not camouflage for recreational marijuana."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture plans to release its rules for hemp soon and Boyle said that as of now, possibly the most likely scenario for hemp to become legal to grow in Idaho in 2020 is for lawmakers next year to adopt the USDA plan. USDA left it up to states to adopt the federal hemp plan or create their own.

See **HEMP**, page 35

# Idaho Farm Bureau

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A mature Douglas-fir tussock moth larva.

Photo by Chris Schnepf

# Douglas-fir tussock moth on the uptick

By Randy Brooks and Chris Schnepf  
*University of Idaho*

If you've driven north of Boise toward McCall, perhaps you've noticed a lot of trees turning red. As it turns out, it's an outbreak of a defoliating insect known as the Douglas-fir tussock moth.

Because the tree species that Douglas-fir tussock moth feeds on are found in so many parts of the state, this critter can be found throughout Idaho.

It most commonly causes problems on drier sites such as ridgetops and upper slopes, but during epidemic years, it can be found on moist sites as well. Historically, Moscow Mountain, McCroskey State Park, the Coeur d'Alene Indian

Reservation, and the Owyhee Mountains have all experienced large outbreaks.

The current outbreak started with defoliation near Craters of the Moon National Monument and on the Boise National Forest near Sage Hen Reservoir in 2017.

Defoliation in 2018 was centered on the Boise National Forest and adjacent state and private lands near Smiths Ferry and totaled over 100,000 acres. Additional defoliation occurred on the Payette National Forest in Valley County. In 2019, defoliation expanded in the same areas and further into Round Valley and Long Valley.

Additional defoliation is occurring near Snowbank and also north of New Meadows. Isolated areas of defoliation are also occurring in Teton



County, Blaine County and near Fairfield.

No defoliation is occurring in northern Idaho at the present time, but landowners have reported larvae south of Coeur d'Alene and near Viola (north of Moscow). Tussock moth has cyclical outbreaks that usually last 3-4 years. The outbreak in southern Idaho seems to be declining, and the populations are ramping up in northern Idaho.

### Identification

As with most defoliating moths and butterflies, larvae ("caterpillars") are the stage of tussock moth that defoliate trees. Young tussock moth larvae are gray to black, 1/8th to 1/4 inch long, and covered with long, fine hairs.

As the caterpillars mature, they develop four distinctive tan "tussocks" (compact hair tufts) on top and long, dark, hair "horns" (two in front and one in back). Mature larvae are also covered with short hairs radiating from red button-like centers. They can grow to 1 1/4 inches long.

Another distinctive characteristic of this insect is the grayish-brown, hairy cocoons on which the female moths lay their egg cases. They are most commonly found on the underside of small twigs on the branches, but amidst heavy outbreaks, they can be found all over the place (e.g., under fence rails).

Be careful handling cocoons or mature caterpillars (see below). Adult tussock moths are relatively non-descript brown to gray moths. The female moth has rudimentary wings and is flightless. This means that small larvae are moved short distances by wind. This also means that resident populations of tussock moths can occur throughout Idaho wherever the favorite hosts occur.

The most obvious difference between tussock moth and the western spruce budworm, another insect that commonly defoliates the same trees as tussock moth, is that budworm larva is brown with distinct white spots and lacks the many dense hairs that tussock moth larvae have.

Spruce budworm and hemlock looper are also currently causing a lot of defoliation in Idaho this year and will be the topic of the next issue of this publication. If you are not sure what you have, don't hesitate



Photo by Chris Schnepf

**An outbreak of Douglas-fir tussock moth has caused these trees to turn red.**

to bring a sample in to the local University of Idaho Extension office for positive identification.

### Damage

The primary hosts of Douglas-fir tussock moth in Idaho forests are Douglas fir, grand fir, subalpine fir, and occasionally Engelmann spruce. Colorado blue spruce is often defoliated in landscape situations.

If populations are high and they have "chewed up" the preferred species, larvae will feed on other species such as larch, understory shrubs, or even pines. Damage on pines, larch and Engelmann spruce in forested situations is usually minor.

Tussock moth caterpillars start feeding in late spring in new foliage at the top of the tree and the ends of branches. Small larvae can be blown from tree to tree in the wind. As the larvae mature, they start feeding on older foliage and lower in the tree.

Tussock moth defoliation often kills the top of the tree and slows tree growth. Heavy defoliation can kill the tree, especially if it is repeated the next year. Extensive mortality occurred in southern Idaho from 2018 feeding, which occurred during a droughty summer.

### Management

Douglas-fir tussock moth is native to

Idaho forests. There is typically some endemic level of tussock moth activity here every year, but it often goes unnoticed until populations boom – usually about every 8-10 years, and most often on sites that have previously had tussock moth problems.

As populations of the insect grow, so do populations of tussock moth's natural enemies (birds, predatory insects, parasites, etc.). If populations are high enough for a long time, a native virus typically builds up and kills the larvae, drastically reducing tussock moth populations quickly (usually within a year).

For some infestations, the population may crash for lack of additional suitable food. Tussock moth outbreaks typically last three years in Idaho.

Lightly defoliated trees often bounce back no worse for the wear, save for some reduced growth. For landscape trees, supplemental watering and fertilization may help this.

For forest trees, especially those stands that are hit by every cycle of the insect, the best long-term solution is to favor species that are less attractive to the insect, such as pines and larch.

Top kill from tussock moth defoliation often results in a fork-topped tree as lateral branches compete to become the new top.



Photo by Chris Schnepf

**Douglas-fir tussock moth cocoons are very hairy.**

If you are thinning in such a stand, these dead or forked trees should be removed in favor of trees with single live tops.

For home landscape trees, and in forest settings if populations are large and growing and the cost of losing trees or their growth is high, pesticides may be used to kill the insects or at least reduce the severity and longevity of the outbreak.

Several chemical insecticides and a microbial pesticide called *Bacillus thuringiensis* (or “Bt.” for short) are labeled for tussock moth. These pesticides can also kill other non-target insects where they are applied. Generally, these materials must be applied when the larvae are young (their second instar, which usually means mid-June in northern Idaho).

Insecticides become less effective against larger larvae. You may want to touch base with your local UI Extension office or state forestry office for the most specific local recommendations on timing.

Pesticides present an additional challenge of getting the material to the top of the tree where the insects are. For a homeowner, that usually means hiring someone with the equipment and a pesticide applicator’s license.

For forest infestations it means hiring an aerial spray service to apply the material with a plane or helicopter. Both options can be expensive, so the costs and benefits of spraying should be evaluated thoughtfully.

One of the key strategies in managing Douglas-fir tussock moth in forests is to anticipate cyclic population increases. To this end, you may have noticed triangular box traps in the woods – these have sticky surfaces and a pheromone bait inside to monitor tussock moth populations.

Similar boxes with different pheromones are used to monitor other insect populations, such as gypsy moth. State and federal agencies also make aerial and ground surveys for tussock moth populations in regions that have historically had outbreaks.

In the Panhandle, landscape spruce trees by defoliated tussock moth are often a harbinger of defoliation of forest trees in succeeding years. Idaho Department of Lands is getting reports of defoliation in these “sentinel trees” in northern Idaho.

### **Tussockosis**

Be careful working around trees that are loaded with tussock moth larvae and cocoons. The fine hairs from tussock moth larvae can give some people a skin rash or other allergic reactions, a condition referred to as “tussockosis.”

Wearing protective clothing and other measures designed to minimize contact with these hairs should reduce risk of allergic reactions. Cocoons and egg masses also contain these hairs, so handle them with care.

### **Conclusion**

Before partial cutting and fire exclusion gave an edge to grand fir and Douglas-fir in Idaho, pines and larch would have dominated most of the sites where tussock moths cause the most damage. One can make the case that tussock moths are simply nature’s way of taking out tree species that are poorly adapted to these sites.

So again, as with so many forest insect or disease problems, the main issue is the favoring the right species for the site. Getting away from pure stands of grand fir and Douglas-fir will reduce your forests’ vulnerability to defoliators such as spruce budworm and tussock moth.

It will also reduce problems with root diseases and other insects and disease which plague these tree species in Idaho.

For more information, see “Douglas-fir Tussock Moth Management” at

<https://www.idl.idaho.gov/forestry/forest-health/usfs-management-guide-r1-4.pdf>

<https://www.idl.idaho.gov/forestry/forest-health/usfs-dftm-in-interior-west.pdf>

<https://www.idl.idaho.gov/forestry/forester-forums/id19.pdf>

(Tom Eckberg and Erika Eidson, forest health specialists with the Idaho Department of Lands, contributed to this article.) ■



# Idaho's ag industry welcomes new U of I president

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

MERIDIAN – University of Idaho's new president received a warm welcome July 24 from leaders of the state's agriculture industry.

C. Scott Green, who took over as the university's 19th president on July 1, mingled with several dozen leaders of the state's farming and ranching industry during Food Producers of Idaho's annual summer barbecue, which was held at a farm in Meridian.

FPI represents 40 of the state's farming-related organizations.

Green spoke briefly to participants and chatted individually with many of them.

"What a pleasure to have the new president of the University of Idaho here," said FPI Executive Director Rick Waitley. "We really look forward to having the opportunity to work with him."

Waitley told Green that the people he meets during the barbecue "will be friends and supporters, they will be loyal to the mission and goals that you have."

U of I's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences plays an important role for the state's farming industry because of the research conducted at its nine agricultural research stations around the state. In addition, CALS' county extension offices pass that



Photo by Sean Ellis

New University of Idaho President C. Scott Green, right, speaks with Blaine Jacobson, executive director of the Idaho Wheat Commission, July 24 during Food Producers of Idaho's annual summer barbecue.

information on to farmers, businesses and others.

The college also educates and trains many of the future leaders of Idaho's ag industry, which is the most important sector of the state's economy.

See **PRESIDENT**, page 27

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Photo by Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President Bryan Searle addresses Farm Bureau members during IFBF's 2019 County Presidents' Summer Conference.

# Idaho Farm Bureau members encouraged to remain unified

**By Sean Ellis**  
*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

IDAHO FALLS – Idaho Farm Bureau Federation members can continue to accomplish meaningful things if they remain unified.

That was one of the main messages from Farm Bureau leaders during IFBF's 2019 County Presidents' Summer Conference, which was attended by 21 of Idaho's 36 county Farm Bureau presidents, as well as members of IFBF's board of directors.

During the two-day conference, participants received updates on farming and legislative issues and offered feedback.

"Our strength as an organization is that we are able to work in unity," said IFBF CEO Rick Keller. "Alone we can do good but together we can do more than what we can do separately. Our strength comes from being (unified)."

Keller also offered some tips on how to build unity, including having clearly defined goals and roles, establishing trust, encouraging open communication and

practicing unity.

"Unity is something that doesn't just happen," he said. "We need to keep practicing and practicing and practicing. If we are unified ... we can do great things together."

Unity starts with the grassroots, said IFBF President Bryan Searle, a farmer from Shelley.

"It's all about the grassroots; when we have strong county Farm Bureaus, we have a strong state organization," he said. "As long as we continue to work together,

we'll be strong.”

Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance Co. of Idaho CEO Paul Roberts told conference participants the insurance company is fiscally sound and he also said the Idaho Farm Bureau name is recognized and well-respected around the state.

The Idaho Business Review's annual reader rankings rated the insurance company this year as the best insurance agency in Idaho for the third straight year, Roberts said.

“That speaks a lot to the kind of service we provide, particularly in our county offices,” he said. “They do an excellent job providing service to our customers.”

The No. 1 ranking is also partially a result of the extensive community service activities that Farm Bureau participates in, said Roberts, who provided at least a dozen examples.

Farm Bureau's involvement in communities “goes far beyond this,” he added. “I've only mentioned a few of the things that we do. We do get really involved in our local communities. That is part of what makes us a well-respected and well-known organization throughout the state.”

During the conference, Farm Bureau members were encouraged to become more engaged in the legislative process. That will become more important as Idaho's population continues to grow rapidly, said Russ Hendricks, director of IFBF's governmental affairs division.

He said groups and people on the opposite side of issues that Farm Bureau sup-

ports or opposes have started to become much more organized and engaged.

As an example, he pointed to a few major pieces of legislation during the 2019 Idaho legislative session, including a bill that would have given rural Idahoans a bigger say in whether proposed voter initiatives make the ballot.

IFBF supported that proposal.

People opposed to the bill, mainly from Boise, showed up in large numbers to testify against the legislation, which passed the House and Senate but was vetoed by the governor.

“The opposition were the ones involved in setting the narrative and tone and we, not so much,” Hendricks said. “The opposition is getting much more engaged and involved.”

This organized opposition to a few major issues that appeared during the legislative session was new and different this year and likely not a one-time thing given the state's rapid growth, he said.

“Things are changing and our opposition is getting more energized and organized,” Hendricks said.

Farm Bureau county presidents were encouraged to help enlist other people to become more engaged in the legislative process and show up at the Capitol to testify on major issues when necessary.

“The days of sitting back and saying, ‘The (lobbyists) in Boise will take care of this’ are coming to an end,” Hendricks said. “We are all going to have to get engaged in one way or another.”

His take on the issue was seconded by Sen. Mark Harris, a Republican rancher from Soda Springs and IFBF member.

“Times are changing in Idaho,” he told conference participants. “The growth in (the Boise area) is crazy. We are seeing a lot of people coming into the state of Idaho with ideas that are different than ours.”

This has led to the creation of activist groups and “they are vocal and they are very active,” Harris said.

He said it was uncanny how quickly these groups reacted to the initiatives bill.

“We haven't seen the last of that,” Harris said. “It's going to be the new norm in Idaho.”

He encouraged more farmers and ranchers to show up to testify on important issues.

“I can't express how much you are loved by your legislators; legislators love farmers and ranchers ... and your voice carries a lot of weight,” he said. “The legislative session is harvest time and we need all hands on deck when that happens.”

When the state's redistricting process takes place in 2020, rural Idaho will probably lose two to three legislative districts to Ada and Canyon counties, Harris said. That could mean the loss of six to nine farm-friendly lawmakers.

“It's more important than ever to remain active in groups like Farm Bureau and keep our voice strong,” he said. ■

## PRESIDENT

*Continued from page 25*

During his first few weeks on the job, Green has already toured farm country, visited U of I county extension offices and met with ag industry leaders.

U of I officials said one of Green's top early priorities is to meet with farm industry leaders.

“It says a lot that in his first few weeks on the job, he is willing to come out and immerse himself in agriculture,” said Stacey Katseanes Satterlee, executive director of Idaho Grain Pro-

ducers Association, which represents the state's wheat and barley growers.

“That's a wonderful sign that ... he will be a great advocate for agriculture in the state.”

Green was born in Moscow, Idaho, and grew up in Boise. He graduated from U of I in 1984 with a bachelor of science degree in accounting.

Speaking about his return to Idaho, he told FPI members “it got a little emotional as we crossed the border and rolled into Moscow.”

“It means a lot to me to be back and

this warm welcome is something I'll never forget,” he said.

He said three of the main things the university wants to focus on are student success, research and “getting our story out there. Our college of agriculture is truly amazing; you know that. Our job is to get that story out.”

“I'm really happy I got to meet him,” said Drew Eggers, who owns the farm where the barbecue was held. “I was really encouraged by his comments about the important role that agriculture plays in the university.” ■



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## Executive Service. Always.



# Barley commission budget heavy on research

By Sean Ellis

*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

IDAHO FALLS – The Idaho Barley Commission has reduced its annual revenue projection about 6 percent for the coming fiscal year, compared with last year.

But the commission's fiscal year 2020 budget is still heavy on research, as always.

According to IBC Administrator Laura Wilder, several major beer brewing companies that purchase malt barley from Idaho farmers have cut their contract volumes back in 2019 in an effort to whittle down the barley supplies they have in storage.

As a result, the barley commission has reduced its annual revenue projection 6 percent for the coming fiscal year.

Idaho barley farmers pay an assessment of 3 cents per hundred pounds of barley sold to fund the commission's research, promotion, market development and grower education activities.

The IBC's four commissioners – three barley growers and one barley industry representative – voted during their regular meeting June 21 to set the IBC's fiscal 2019-2020 budget at \$719,915.

Forty-two percent of the budget, or \$301,000, will go toward various research projects. That represents a 9 percent increase in spending for research compared with last year.

IBC commissioners said research always has been and remains the main focus of the commission.

Many of the advancements in yields, new barley varieties and agronomic improvements have been a result of the money that barley growers have provided for research over the past several decades, said IBC commission and Rupert farmer Mike Wilkins.

"The biggest percentage of our budget always goes toward research," he said. "It's really important for our industry. If we don't have the research, we don't have a future in our industry."

Wilkins, who has been farming for

40 years, said barley growers used to be happy with 100-120 bushels per acre but now that would be considered a poor yielding crop.

"That gain in yields is all through research and variety development, which were funded by grower dollars," he said.

"Newer varieties and more productive varieties give us greater yields and that all comes from research," said IBC commissioner and Soda Springs grower Scott Brown.

The big seed companies don't do the research the industry needs because barley is a relatively small crop compared to other crops like wheat, corn and soybeans, he added.

"We can't rely on the big companies to do barley research," Brown said. "It takes public universities, the land grant universities, to do the research for us. We as an industry have to fund our own research because we're such a small crop."

The IBC approved funding for 13 projects with University of Idaho researchers and commissioners also approved funding for three projects being conducted by USDA Agricultural Research Service researchers.

The IBC projects its total income in fiscal year 2019-2020 to be \$657,536, down from \$697,449 during fiscal 2018-2019.

The commission board will review the budget during its October meeting and make any needed adjustments then.

Wilder said the overall U.S. beer industry is solid, with 42 percent of consumers who consume alcohol preferring beer, compared to 34 percent for wine and 28 percent for spirits, according to a 2018 Gallup Poll.

But while the preference for beer remains steady, preferences for craft and imported beer have grown while dollar sales of domestic premium brands, such as Budweiser, Miller and Coors, declined 4.2 percent last year.

Most of Idaho's barley acres are contracted to companies that produce those premium brand beers.

"IBC commissioners will continue to

watch changes and developments in the malting and brewing industry, which could impact commission funding and programs," Wilder said. "While the beer industry is fairly flat overall, interest in food barley exports and domestic use is growing steadily and is providing new opportunities for growers in some areas already."

Idaho ranks No. 1 in the nation in barley production with more than 34 percent of the U.S. crop. Idaho produced 53.5 million bushels of barley in 2018 and about 80 percent of that production was for malt barley for the beer industry. The rest was used for food barley or livestock feed.

During the commission's June meeting, representatives from Anheuser Busch and MillerCoors, which together purchase a large percentage of the malt barley produced in Idaho, were asked how any future decline in domestic premium brand beer consumption would impact barley production in Idaho.

Both said they didn't anticipate any significant reduction in their company's purchasing of barley from Idaho growers because the state is a reliable, premium barley growing region.

"There is a reason Idaho is No. 1 in barley production," said IBC commissioner Jason Boose, regional manager for MillerCoors. "It's because Idaho is world class and it's dependable year in and year out. Idaho is just a consistent barley producing region. In the long term, you won't see any dramatic reduction."

Anheuser Busch representative Tim Pella, whose term on the barley commission ended June 30, echoed those sentiments.

After hearing from the industry reps, "It makes things look positive for Idaho for a long time," Wilder said.

The barley commission's fiscal 2019-2020 budget also includes \$129,000 for market development, \$124,000 for industry partnerships and policy development, and \$63,000 for grower education and information. ■

## A smart marketing plan will pay dividends

**W**e all do the same no matter where we might gather. We talk politics and then we talk about politics and when we are done with that we talk about politics. Most often we get a great deal of enjoyment discussing things we may or may not have any control over.



When was the last time you were engaged in a conversation about the basis for wheat in your area? Did you discuss the seasonal trend and the possibility of the basis strengthening and when that might take place?

What about a discussion about the futures and how you can take advantage of the futures in your hedging program. The answer is, you might have done this but the odds are very slim.

Yet these are the topics that could very well give you the opportunity to be profitable even when it looks as though prices are weak.

Things are changing and changing rapidly. Markets are very volatile and most often the volatility doesn't have anything to do with the fundamental factors of supply and demand but rather the supply/demand of paper trading in Chicago.

What are the speculators in the market doing? Are they adding to an already long or short position? Will

they at some point in time trade out of that position and what could the market do when they offset their position?

As usual, I have more questions than answers; however, there is an answer to these questions

and that is, "One size doesn't fit all." The answers are as diverse as your operation is from your neighbors.

This is the biggest reason we don't hear these discussions in public. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't have them. The answers to how you market and how a good hedging program will benefit you are different than your neighbors.

Let's take a look at just what hedging could have done for you over the past six months. Could you have locked in the futures side of your price equation for wheat at \$1 to \$1.50 per bushel higher than the current market?

For the corn producers, what about 50 to 55 cents per bushel higher than the current market?

The answer to both of these questions is yes.

When we discuss dealing in the futures market in order to hedge your price we hear that dealing in futures is a risky business. Yes, it is, and so is not dealing in futures as a tool to manage your price risk.

Futures are \$1 per bushel lower than they were in early spring and so is the cash price for your wheat. So, as you can see, there is also risk in not hedging your commodities.

Yes, the markets are lower but the party is not over just yet. Let's watch these markets closely. You will still have opportunities to do well over the next six months but you will need to be on top of the market.

Will the strength come from the futures or from basis or both? There is one thing for sure, the strength will be there and it could be very short-lived.

When you see this, you need to take the emotion out of the market and not try to guess just how much higher the market will move but rather remember that it is important to sell when someone wants to buy.

When the strength in the bid is from a basis, the market is telling us that the local market needs to buy product. This is when you need to take advantage of the strength in the basis and contract wheat.

Simple, huh!

Well it's not, and I don't want you to think that it is. However, it isn't difficult either, it just takes some time and effort. Taking the time and effort to learn and then implement your marketing and hedging program will pay you large dividends in the future.

*Clark Johnston is a grain marketing specialist and owner of JC Management Co. of Ogden, Utah. He can be reached at [clark@jcmangement.net](mailto:clark@jcmangement.net). ■*

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Photo by Jake Putnam

Ranchers, state and federal game managers participated in a grizzly bear tour held near Bonners Ferry Aug. 9. The tour was organized by Boundary County Farm Bureau.

# Boundary County Farm Bureau holds grizzly bear tour

By Jake Putnam

*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

BONNERS FERRY – Grizzly bears sightings north of Bonners Ferry started just after the first of May this year.

Ranchers all along Idaho Highway 1 reported disturbances, including Darcy Lammers.

“Olivia my youngest ran into the house and said, ‘Mom and Dad, I can’t find the lambs,’” Lammers said during a grizzly bear tour Aug. 9 organized by Boundary County Farm Bureau. “The lambs are inside this pen outside the barn. I went out there and there were wool and blood everywhere.”

Outside of the fence, the Lammers found entrails and wool. They were missing three sheep.

“At first I thought coyotes, maybe a mountain lion, but the fence has been pulled down,” said Lammers. “At that point, I knew it could only be a bear.”

Just up the road a few miles, Chris Smith also lost a couple of sheep.

“I went out the next day to do some chores and there were dead animals in the pen,” Smith told members of the tour. “I decided then to call the authorities.”

That’s where the problems started. The grizzly bear is on the endangered species list

and the red tape ranchers must go through to protect themselves and to address livestock losses is complicated.

“So I think what we need to do is hear the ranchers’ stories, we need to talk amongst ourselves and we need to come up with a game plan,” said BCFB President John Kellogg.

After Kellogg started getting calls from ranchers, he set up the grizzly tour, with the aim of getting ranchers, state, and federal game managers together to talk about concerns.

“I was actually disappointed with the Idaho Fish and Game response,” Smith said. “I think they were looking out for the rights of the animal, and I felt like I had no recourse from something that was attacking my livestock and threatening the safety of my family.”

He said grizzly bear attacks are not only an economic issue in the county but a safety issue as well.

Federal managers say that while they’re aware of safety issues, they’re also aware that the Endangered Species Act is the law of the land.

“The law states that you cannot protect livestock or property (from a grizzly bear) and killing a grizzly bear in that regard is not legitimate under the law,” said Wayne Kas-

worm of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

At the Lammers place, Darcy called conservation officers and they set up a snare to catch the offending grizzly. Then something alarming happened.

“I had been notified by Fish and Game that there was a collared grizzly bear a mile from my house,” said Lammers. “I was standing there with my pistol and I turned around and the bear came up from the back corner of the corral, headed toward us. I didn’t know where the kids were, the bear was 20 yards away. I got the kids in the barn and pulled my pistol and held it on the bear. All that went through my mind at that point was that if I pull the trigger, I’m going to jail.”

That bear was snared in a trap, but it took U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials more than 13 hours to get the bear relocated.

“Nobody thought about the safety of my family for more than 13 hours,” said Lammers.

USFWS officials say their hands are tied and change will come when bear populations increase.

“We are not quite to the point of talking about delisting at this point, but I’d like to say that we are making progress here, very good progress moving toward those goals,” said Kasworm. ■



Photo by John O'Connell

Aberdeen farmer Ritchey Toevs evaluates the progress of his Clearwater Russet potato crop. The potato variety presents an added benefit in that it doesn't seem to need fumigation.

# Local spud farmer experiments with natural fumigants

By John O'Connell

*Intermountain Farm and Ranch*

ABERDEEN — A local potato farmer believes he can cut back on his use of fumigation by raising two specific commercial crops — oriental mustard and a promising new spud variety called Clearwater Russet.

Ritchey Toevs is one of 17 Idaho growers raising oriental mustard for American Falls-based Mountain States Oilseeds. The same chemicals that make mustard spicy, glucosinolate and isothiocyanate, also serve as a natural fumigant, controlling harmful nematodes in his soil.

Toevs has also found he doesn't need to fumigate potato fields prior to planting Clearwater, which was initially crossed in

Aberdeen and has moderate resistance to verticillium wilt, which is spread by the root-lesion nematode.

Clearwater acreage has been on the rise during the past few years, since McDonald's added it to its short list of approved varieties for making its fries.

Toevs estimates it costs him \$200 per acre to apply a metam sodium-based fumigant prior to raising potatoes. He's in his second season of raising oriental mustard, having planted 100 acres in both 2018 and 2019.

In the spuds he planted following last year's mustard crop, Toevs fumigated all but a 30-foot-wide strip extending the length of the field. He'll compare yields and quality in the untreated strip against the rest of the field to gauge the efficacy of oriental mustard as a

natural fumigant.

Toevs is paid a quarter per pound of mustard seed.

"(Oriental mustard) looks like a good crop," Toevs said. "It's not as profitable as wheat, but if we can get a benefit in soil health — if we do not need a fumigant the next year — it would be competitive with small grains."

He takes it as a good sign that he can't tell any difference between his test strip and the rest of the field at a glance, but he'll have more definitive data after harvest. Toevs has also found that mustard does a good job of suppressing weeds.

Bill Meadows, owner and founder of Mountain States Oilseeds, said his market for oriental mustard has been increasing

every year. His buyers in Asia have made three trips to American Falls, and Meadows said they find his growers produce world-class quality.

His growers raise three varieties of mustard: oriental, which has the highest concentration of glucosinolate of his table varieties; brown, which has a moderate concentration; and yellow, which has the lowest concentration.

“I think we’re doing some really fantastic things with mustard,” Meadows said.

Some growers plant a special fumigant mustard variety with higher levels of the beneficial chemicals following wheat harvest. The mustard is then tilled into the soil.

Meadows believes research is needed to compare the effectiveness of fumigant varieties against commercial varieties that have lower concentrations of the compounds but are allowed to grow in fields for longer durations.

“Is time in the field more important than the level of glucosinolate in the plant?” Meadows asked.

Though Toevs is relatively new at raising oriental mustard, he’s one of the more experienced Clearwater growers. He’s in his

third year of raising Clearwater as a named variety and also harvested crops of the spud when it was just a numbered line. He planted 450 acres this season for Lamb Weston.

In addition to avoiding the need for fumigation, Clearwater saves him about 9 cents per hundredweight in nitrogen costs, given that it takes in fertilizer extremely efficiently. The tradeoff for raising it is that processors pay a bit less for Clearwater than many other varieties.

Kamren Koopin, of American Falls, has planted 145 acres in his first year of raising Clearwater. He didn’t fumigate the field, and he’s found the variety to be efficient at using fertilizer. He emphasized Clearwater has a high dry matter content, bruises easily and can be tough to store, so it’s important to be careful harvesting the variety.

Though processors have been demanding more Clearwater, Koopin said a tight seed supply likely limited planting this season.

Data on planted Clearwater acreage isn’t yet available for 2019, but U.S. growers planted 2,446 acres in 2018, with 1,323 of those acres planted in Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

According to the Potato Variety Management Institute, which markets potato varieties developed through the cooperative public breeding programs of the three states, Clearwater producers a high percentage of big tubers, is high in protein, makes an ideal fry color and is resistant to potato virus X and late blight. It’s also moderately resistant to verticillium, common scab and potato virus Y.

The variety is medium to late maturing and can be used both for processing and in the fresh market.

“The acreage is definitely going up,” said Jeanne Debons, executive director of PVMI. “We’re expecting good royalties this year as a result of Clearwater going up and our other (varieties) doing OK.”

Debons noted that Clearwater is the first modern potato variety to be accepted by McDonald’s.

“Every time they release a new variety, they have to be better than before,” Debons said. “The fact that this one has come later means it has advantages in it that aren’t included in the other (approved McDonald’s varieties.)” ■

## HEMP

*Continued from page 19*

Another option is for legislators next year to pass a bill that directs the ISDA to develop a hemp plan. But if that happens, it might mean Idaho farmers would have to wait until 2021 before they could plant hemp.

Hari Heath, who testified in favor of the hemp legislation this year and who now helps grow hemp on a farm in Washington, said there’s another potential avenue that could result in Idaho farmers being allowed to grow hemp next year.

He said the Idaho Pharmacy Board has to conform the state’s Schedule 1 drug list to the federal Schedule 1 list, which now has an exemption for industrial hemp. That conformity should occur this fall, he said, which, if it happens, would open the door for Idaho farmers to be allowed to grow hemp next spring.

“If the administrative side of government does its job, we could buy seeds and plant hemp next spring,” he said.

But Tewalt said producers should not buy seeds or grow the crop unless something

definitive happens that allows farmers to legally grow hemp in Idaho.

The 2014 farm bill allowed for hemp to be grown for research purposes or pilot projects if states chose to allow that, which Idaho did not. The 2018 farm bill now allows for hemp to be grown legally as a commercial agricultural crop.

According to Heath, Idaho is now one of only three states with a blanket ban on hemp, which means the longer the state delays adopting a hemp plan, the further Idaho producers will fall behind the rest of the country when it comes to growing and marketing hemp.

During public testimony on Idaho’s hemp-related bills earlier this year, several people said the income potential from hemp was as much as \$35,000 an acre, a claim that some lawmakers claimed was borderline propaganda.

Heath said the income potential is near that amount per acre when it comes to growing hemp for the CBD oil market. But that high income potential will decrease in a

few years as more farmers start growing the crop, he added.

He also said it’s proving to be a difficult crop to grow.

“You are not going to just toss some seeds in the ground and come back in a few months and harvest a \$30,000-an-acre crop,” he said. “There are lots of details to make it come out right. It’s not as simple as some other crops.”

Erica Stark, executive director of the National Hemp Association, said there aren’t any accurate national hemp acreage counts but it’s safe to say interest in the crop has exploded since the farm bill’s passage.

“I’m quite confident the acreage will have tripled if not quadrupled over the last year,” she said. “There’s definitely a ton of interest in hemp.”

She said estimates are that the U.S. market for hemp grown for CBD oil will be in the billion-dollar range next year.

“In the next five years, it’s going to be a multi-billion-dollar industry for sure,” Stark said. ■

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# Nursery's pre-vegetated mats and native plants restore wetlands, control erosion

By Dianna Troyer

For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

A nursery near Rexburg relies on an unusual medium called coir to grow pre-vegetated wetland sod mats and logs for restoration projects throughout the West.

Coir, the fiber from the outer husk of coconuts, provides an ideal durable and biodegradable medium to grow native wetland plants hydroponically.

Once mature in about five weeks, the mats – each 3.2 feet wide and 16.2 feet long – can be easily rolled into place.

“A lot of farmers and ranchers will grade an area, then lay the sod mats to stabilize and protect ponds and stream banks from erosion and weeds,” said Ty Blacker, general manager of North Fork Native Plants. “The mats have well-developed root systems with high shoot cover, so they incorporate quickly into soil.”

The 20-acre nursery, stretching along the banks of the Henry's Fork of the Snake River, has become the leading producer of pre-vegetated coir mats and logs in the western United States. The nursery's 12 lined ponds cover a surface area exceeding eight acres.

“In a typical growing season, we produce nearly 4,000 pre-vegetated coir mats,” said Blacker, who leads a staff of four full-time and 25 to 30 seasonal employees.

The coir is also used to grow pre-vegetated 12-inch-wide, 10-foot-long logs. In steep areas that cannot be graded, the logs are anchored to establish plants such as sedges and willows.

“The logs have minimal soil requirements and can tolerate fluctuating water levels in just a few weeks,” Blacker said.

Besides farmers and ranchers, other clients have included state and federal wildlife agencies, city and county governments, businesses, utilities and transportation departments.

“There aren't a lot of nurseries growing native wetland plants, so we fill that void,” Blacker said.

Wildlife biologist Jeff Klausmann founded the nursery in 2003 after attending a conference in Europe and seeing how Germans were successfully using pre-vegetated coir mats and logs to restore wetlands.

“When I started the nursery, I liked to say we're in the business of farming wildlife,” Klausmann said. “It's rewarding to work with producers who see the value in growing wildlife alongside their cash crops.”

The nursery staff also grows bare-root and containers of wetland and native plants that are shipped to the wholesale market throughout the West. Native plants include herbaceous wetland plants, willows, shrubs, and trees.

The plants are raised in four separate climate-controlled greenhouses that provide a production area of more than 12,000 square feet.

“On average, we produce more than 300,000 to 400,000 plugs of



Photo by North Fork Native Plants

**North Fork Native Plants near Rexburg is the largest producer of pre-vegetated coir mats and logs in the West. The nursery also grows specific aquatic plants for custom projects.**

various plants,” Blacker said. “We also do custom contracts and will grow plants on contract to meet the specific needs of a project.”

The nursery also has a room for handling, processing and cleaning seed.

“We follow stringent handling protocols and label and track each seed lot from initial receipt, through any cleaning and stratification processes before sowing out in our greenhouses,” Blacker said.

The nursery's commercial grade cold storage units provide optimal temperature control for both seed storage and stratification.

“We're a leading nursery in producing innovative products for the restoration, reclamation and landscaping industries,” Blacker said. ■



Photo by John O'Connell

Jonathan Whitworth, a research plant pathologist with USDA's Agricultural Research Service, discusses how potato breeding efforts and research involving straw mulch and mineral oil to prevent the spread of potato virus Y are underway in Aberdeen.

# Research aims to help seed potato growers avoid spud virus

By John O'Connell

*Intermountain Farm & Ranch*

ABERDEEN — Ongoing studies at the University of Idaho's Aberdeen Research & Extension Center seek to help seed potato growers avoid a chronically troublesome disease spread by aphids, called potato virus Y.

One UI research project aims to better understand the importance of when aphid migrations occur and how that correlates with the severity of disease transmission.

Another project will attempt to establish a connection between the temperature and aphid migrations. A third project is studying how covering the space between potato rows with straw mulch or spraying

foliage with mineral oil may deter aphids from probing spud plants. UI potato breeders are also involved in the effort, developing new potato varieties with resistance to PVY strains.

PVY is one of the most significant diseases affecting potatoes and is especially costly for seed growers because it can remain latent in potato seed, expanding with

each subsequent generation of planting. The disease causes significant yield losses, often with difficult symptoms to detect, and common strains in Idaho also cause tuber necrosis.

“For some reason we’re just not able to nail that coffin (on PVY), and it’s been a chronic problem for decades, but more recently, it’s been a struggle across the country,” said Kasia Duellman, UI Extension seed potato specialist.

Duellman explained that another disease spread by aphids, called potato leafroll virus, used to be a significant problem in the state, but it’s since been effectively controlled with insecticides.

Unlike leafroll, which is spread by colonizing aphids, PVY is spread by migratory aphids that may feed on a plant while passing through, making it tougher to prevent transmission with insecticides.

Duellman is leading research in Aberdeen that entails covering potato rows at different periods throughout the year to keep insects out and removing covers after vines are killed at the season’s end.

“One of the things we want to look at is when is movement of PVY most important for a seed potato grower? — in the early part of the season? at the end of the season? — and when are aphids that can move the virus likely to be moving the virus? and when is that movement most important?” Duellman said.

The project also entails setting out yellow buckets, each containing a little copper sulfate and a drop of dish soap, to attract and capture aphids. Researchers will be monitoring a network of about 30 buckets, with help from industry agronomists.

UI research technician Jill Randall will be helping entomologists Eric Wenninger and Andy Jensen to count aphids from the buckets and determine the types.

“Our job is to find out how many aphids are coming and when they’re peaking,” Duellman said, adding the information will be relayed to seed potato growers.

Duellman said Idaho Crop Improvement Association has been operating an aphid monitoring network for several years, but UI got involved this year to expand it and make it more meaningful.

UI researchers Alex Karasev, who is



Photo by John O’Connell

**Kasia Duellman, a University of Idaho Extension seed potato specialist, discusses her research to cover or expose different rows of potatoes to aphids, thereby determining when aphid migrations are most likely to result in transmission of potato virus Y.**

a plant virologist, and Nora Olsen, who is a potato storage expert, are assisting Wenninger in studying how hot temperatures may affect aphid migration. The research could potentially provide growers a predictive tool to aid in management decisions.

Jonathan Whitworth, a research plant pathologist with USDA’s Agricultural Research Service who works closely with UI, said the university’s breeding program has been working to breed PVY resistance genes into its germplasm.

He said the program is working to convince potato processors to use the PVY-resistant spud variety Payette Russet, and another resistant line is in the pipeline to become a variety.

Whitworth is involved in other research to prevent aphids from feeding on potato plants and spreading PVY. In some research plots, straw mulch covers the ground between potato rows. Whitworth said aphids seem to prefer to land on bare soil.

In other rows, mineral oil has been sprayed on foliage, which also seems to irritate aphids. Some rows have combinations of the techniques.



Photo by John O’Connell

**Hay is used in an experimental plot to try to deter aphids from probing on potato plants. Aphids like bare soil and the treatment appears to be effective in reducing the transmission of potato virus Y.**

Potato leaves will be tested for the virus to see how well the trials worked. Whitworth said the methods reduced PVY infections by as much as 20 percent in preliminary testing in Kimberly. ■



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