GEM STATE Producer
Idaho Farm Bureau
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Growing GARLIC SEED In Idaho

The Zipline

By Zippy Duvall
President, American Farm Bureau Federation

Imagine, grow, lead at the 2026 American Farm Bureau Convention

Imagination and growth fuel farming. Farmers and ranchers survey fields, flocks, herds, and orchards, imagining the possibilities. We don't settle for the same old, and we are always looking for ways to grow and do better for our farms and families.

The same is true for our leadership journey in agriculture and in Farm Bureau. That is why the American Farm Bureau Convention is the go-to event to meet other farmers and agricultural leaders, grow and learn together, imagine a bright future, and be inspired to lead.

Imagine

Can you imagine yourself at the 2026 AFBF Convention? I encourage you to mark your calendars and start making plans to join us in Anaheim, California, Jan. 9-14, 2026.

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The President's Desk

By Bryan Searle
President, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Spud Day is a big occasion in Shelley

For decades in the small town of Shelley, an annual event called Spud Day has been held to commemorate the Idaho Russet potato.

This is an occasion for those with roots in Shelley to return home to celebrate, along with others from near and far.

Though the population of Shelley is just over 5,000 people, the celebration draws 12,000-15,000 people. They know what Idaho is most famous for and what pays the bills for the local economy.

[See page 14 for a story on Spud Day.]

For those of you who don't know, Shelley is located in East Idaho, in the heart of Idaho potato country. The city is located in Bingham County, the epicenter of potato production in Idaho.

The Shelley High School sports teams are known as the Russets. Yes, the Russet potato, the vegetable that everyone in the world associates Idaho with, is revered in Shelley.

As it should be.

See **SEARLE,** page 6

Inside Farm Bureau

By Zak Miller
CEO, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Toenails versus toes

In the past three months, three members of my family—including myself—have lost our big right toenails. These odd coincidences have sparked some strange thoughts about toes, pain, and how life unfolds in unexpected ways.

- My wife's toenail met its fate thanks to an aggressive table leg after our daughter's wedding reception.
- A prancing horse crushed mine while I was tying a sweet little girl's coat on her saddle.
- My daughter's was flattened by a lumbering show steer after the final showmanship drive.

Each incident led to a bit of family show-and-tell, as we tracked the trauma, loss, and regrowth of our toenails.

It became one of those quirky family topics that somehow sticks around as one of the oddities of family dynamics.

Through these up-close and personal experiences, I've observed a pattern that oddly

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COVER: See page 4 for a story about a small Rupert area farm that is growing garlic seed that is shipped to gardeners and other growers across the nation. Submitted photo

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From homestead to seedhouse

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

A small, family-owned farm near Rupert has found its niche supplying disease-free garlic seed to people around the United States.

Clove by clove, Garlic Gods has built up a customer base across the United States that includes home gardeners as well as some other growers.

The fifth-generation farm is owned by Geoffrey and Jana Yockey, who bought a small amount of acreage from Jana's father in 2018.

With limited acreage remaining from the original homestead, Jana says they had to be strategic in choosing their crop.

"We tried a bunch of different stuff – farmers markets, we had a greenhouse, we tried tomatoes – in the first year," Jana says. Then a friend introduced them to them to someone who grew garlic seed and was on the verge of retiring.

"We bought a bunch of seed from him and that's how we started," Jana says.

This is how the 100-year-old farm went from homestead to seedhouse and it is now one of a handful of garlic farms in Idaho.

"Garlic was the perfect fit," says Geoffrey. "It thrives in our high desert climate, requires careful stewardship, and it's something we're deeply passionate about."

Jana believes one thing that makes the farm stand out is its customer service. She always has her phone with her and welcomes and encourages customers to call with any questions.

She says a lot of customers are first-time gardeners and they have basic questions.

"If they have questions, we're going to answer them to the best of our ability," she says. "I think the fact that we talk to people is a huge thing and part of what makes us unique."

"My husband was a chef for 20-plus years and I used to work in restaurants and customer service is huge for me," Jana adds. "When I go places and people just ignore you, it bothers me. I would say customer service is our No. 1 priority."

The farm also offers educational content on social media and its website to support new growers and encourage seed-saving practices.

Another main asset for the farm is that its garlic seed is certified disease-free.

That's because it is located in a federally quarantined Allium White Rot Protection Zone, which in Idaho helps protect the state's large and established bulb onion industry.

The zone, which encompasses 21 counties in Idaho, includes anything in the onion family, including garlic, which potentially could be a carrier of white rot, which would be bad news for onion farmers.

Because it's in the quarantine zone, the farm's garlic seed is inspected annually by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture to ensure it's disease-free. This provides customers with peace of mind, especially to those who rely on clean, viable seed stock, and is a big asset selling point for the farm's garlic seed, Jana says.

"The fact that we have the quarantine and get all those inspections is huge," she says.

Garlic Gods grows 15 certified garlic varieties – there are about 600 varieties of garlic – that are shipped to customers in all 50 states. Jana says each variety offers different characteristics in flavor, storage life, and growing conditions, "appealing to everyone from backyard gardeners to market growers and

LEFT: **After harvest, the garlic seed is hung over racks and cured for 4-6 weeks.** Submitted photo

Community Supported Agriculture farmers."

The farm sells mostly online but also sells to garden centers around Idaho.

"Basically, we're just cutting out the middleman by selling directly to consumers," Jana says.

She says people usually plant garlic in the fall and harvest it in the late spring or early summer, depending on where they are located. "Garlic likes cold. That's why you plant it in the fall."

The Garlic Gods farm encompasses 55 farmable acres and 5.5 acres of it are planted to garlic this year.

"We can grow a large volume on small acreage," Jana says. "We planted 7 acres to garlic last year, but it was too much … so we baked it off a little."

The rest of the farm is planted to cover crops and the garlic acreage is on a 5-year rotation before it goes back into the same spot.

This helps maintain healthy soil, which is extremely important to Garlic Gods, Jana says.

"For us, the better the health of the soil, the bigger the bulbs will get," she says. "And the bigger the bulbs are, the more people want to plant it."

Jana says the farm follows organic practices – it uses no synthetic fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides – though it's not certified organic by USDA.

Jana and her husband are basically a two-person operation and they personally handle every stage of production: planting, weeding, harvesting, curing, grading, packing, and shipping. They do bring in some help for the harvesting and cleaning part.

After harvest, the garlic is tied into bundles, hung over racks and cured for 4-6 weeks before the stems and roots are cut off.

"Then we take the outer layer of paper off and it takes all that dirt off and then you have a nice, clean garlic bulb," Jana says. "Then we bag it and ship it across the country."

The garlic clove is the seed.

The farm's garlic is sold for seed but if someone has extra that they can't plant, it's fine to eat it.

Jana says she often gets asked about what fertilizers the farm uses. Before they plant in the fall, they bust their garlic into individual cloves and then soak them in a mixture of vodka, baking soda and water.

"If there's anything on the garlic at all, it will kill it," she says.

The cloves are then taken out of this mixture and put into a fish foliar mixture that stimulates the roots to start growing.

"A lot of times, if we soak our garlic today and we plant tomorrow, there are already little roots growing because that fertilizer kick-starts it," Jana says.

The farm ships garlic seed from September through December.

For more information about the farm or to place an order, visit www.garlicgods.com or call (208) 260-8966. ■

DUVALL

Continued from page 2

Our theme this coming year is "Imagine. Grow. Lead." Get ready to be inspired for 2026—this year's convention is already shaping up to be a great time of celebrating the awesome, imaginative work Farm Bureau members do throughout the year.

Once again, we will bring our county Farm Bureaus front and center at our Trade Show, where we will highlight the County Activities of Excellence award winners. Every year, I am inspired by these innovative men and women, who imagine ways to strengthen their local Farm Bureaus and their communities, and I know you will be too.

And speaking of innovation, Farm Bureau's Ag Innovation Challenge will take center stage at the Trade Show, and the grand-prize winner will walk away with $100,000 in start-up funds to drive their business and lead agriculture forward.

Could there be some farm dogs out their dreaming of being top dog in our Farm Dog of the Year contest? The popular contest returns to celebrate the bond between farmers and farm dogs, and the winner will receive $5,000 and a year's supply of Purina dog food.

Grow

Growing and learning is a lifelong process, and I love how excited our Farm Bureau family gets when we come together and learn from each other, experts in the field, and inspirational leaders.

At the 2026 AFBF Convention, we are excited to welcome Tim Tebow as our closing keynote speaker. Tebow is a two-time national champion, Heisman Trophy winner, College Football Hall of Fame inductee, first-round NFL draft pick and former professional baseball player.

'Through these events and leadership development programs, we are empowering and investing in our young Farm Bureau leaders to ensure they're ready to take the reins and continue to lead tomorrow.'

He is also a five-time New York Times best-selling author, speaker and college football analyst, but he is most passionate about his work with the Tim Tebow Foundation, with its mission to bring faith, hope and love to those needing a brighter day in their darkest hour of need.

The foundation is currently fighting for some of the most vulnerable people around the world in more than 90 countries. Farmers and ranchers share that spirit of teamwork and commitment to community, and we can look forward to how Tim Tebow's message will inspire us as we prepare to grow and lead in the coming year.

Beyond our general session hall, we have a full lineup of engaging workshops, offered in four tracks—public policy, rural development, member engagement and consumer engagement. These workshops will help you take your leadership to the next level, inspire ideas for member development, and offer the latest insights on policy and consumer trends.

Plus, you can expect some inspiring programming at our Cultivation Center Stage and Ag Insights Hub on the Trade Show floor again this year.

Lead

Leadership doesn't just happen, it's cultivated.

Investing in the future is a cornerstone of Farm Bureau, and we are committed to empowering young leaders to bring their ideas to the table and play a role in driving agriculture forward.

The future of Farm Bureau and agriculture is only as strong as the leaders we prepare today. That's why we are excited to host a special event this year, the Empowering Young Leaders Reception. This reception will be a chance to celebrate young members and highlight the importance of their leadership.

All registered convention attendees 35 and younger are welcome to join us for an evening of fellowship, food, and fun on Sunday, Jan. 11.

Our 2026 AFBF Convention will also feature the popular, high-stakes Young Farmers & Ranchers competitive events, including: the Achievement Award, the Excellence in Agriculture Award and the Discussion Meet.

Through these events and leadership development programs, we are empowering and investing in our young Farm Bureau leaders to ensure they're ready to take the reins and continue to lead tomorrow.

Are you getting excited yet, imagining the possibilities for growing and leading as we come together for our next convention? While we're still a few months out, you can stay tuned for more announcements and details leading up to the 2026 American Farm Bureau Convention. In the meantime, mark your calendars for Jan. 9-14, 2026. I hope to see you in Anaheim! ■

SEARLE

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Farmers in Bingham County typically grow around 60,000 acres of potatoes each year. That's close to one-fifth of all the potato acres planted in Idaho each year.

For the record, I myself am an Idaho potato farmer.

Also for the record, Idaho still leads the nation in total potato production and Washington state is a distant second in that category.

The annual Shelley Spud Day festival is in its 97th year and is

celebrated on the third Saturday of September, which falls on the 20th this year.

When that day arrives, thousands of people will descend upon Shelley to help the city and its residents honor the Russet potato, which is on our license plates.

They will enjoy a day of fun, family-friendly activities, centered around the potato theme. One of the highlights of the day is the parade, which winds its way through the city.

The best part of Spud Day, for me, is reuniting with friends and watching people enjoy celebrating with all the activities, food and events.

Another highlight is a spud picking contest that awards the fastest potato pickers around. You might think this is a relaxed event, but don't be fooled; competitors take it very seriously.

Another main attraction of Spud Day is a tug-of-war contest known as Spud Tug. This event features a huge amount of instant mashed potatoes prepared in a cement mixer and dumped into a giant pit.

You guessed it: at least some members of the losing team end up in the pit.

As you can clearly see, around Shelley, the potato is a serious matter and we have a lot of pride in it.

Spud Day has a long and rich tradition.

Over the years, Spud Day has garnered national attention and has been covered by Good Morning America, the New York Times, Better Homes and Gardens and National Geographic Travel Magazine.

ESPN showed live footage of the tug-of-war contest in 1993.

Everyone who attends Spud Day can get a free baked potato topped with butter, cheese, sour cream, salt and pepper.

I hope everyone who attends leaves with a renewed appreciation and love for the Russet potato. ■

MILLER

Continued from page 2

mirrors the rhythms of farming and ranching.

Strangely, something as small as a toenail can reflect something as vast as life in agriculture.

It hurts—a lot

The initial injury is sharp, and the pain lingers for a while.

The pain fades

The hurting stops, but the toe looks different. It's not quite like the others. You're reminded of the injury every time you glance down.

Healing begins

New growth starts, slowly transforming the toe. It's not pretty, but it's progress.

It looks odd for a while

The toe remains noticeably different, a reminder of what happened. You wonder if it'll ever look normal again.

Eventually, it's like it never happened

The toe returns to normal, and the memory fades. You stop thinking about it—until someone else loses a toenail.

Life in agriculture often follows a similar arc. Things move along normally until something unexpected hits—drought, hail, market crashes, equipment breakdowns, or employee challenges.

'It's been said—and it remains true—that farming and ranching are great ways to learn from Mother Nature, raise a family, and occasionally make a living.'

Most hardships follow the same pattern:

- Challenges hurt
  Financially and emotionally, they sting. It's okay to acknowledge the pain—it's real, but it won't last forever.
- Lingering effects
  The consequences remain even after the pain subsides: lost crops, damaged equipment, or a strained balance sheet.
- Healing happens
  The drought breaks. Prices improve. Relationships mend. Better days return.
- Things stay different for a while
  Recovery isn't instant. The landscape of farming and ranching shifts, and that's okay. "Different" can be a chance to learn and grow.
- Eventually, it becomes a memory
  We're wired to focus on the present. The past fades, and even tough times lose their sting over time.

It's been said—and it remains true—that farming and ranching are great ways to learn from Mother Nature, raise a family, and occasionally make a living.

Not all three may be true at once, but the heart of a farmer or rancher always believes in the good.

That enduring optimism is one of the greatest strengths of farmers and ranchers, even if they sometimes hobble around with a sore toe. ■

Innovative Uhlorns always willing to try a new crop, boost soil health with biologics

By Dianna Troyer
For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Along with raising conventional food crops, the Uhlorn family often raises questions about innovation to make their northern Idaho farm more productive.

Could sunflowers be a profitable crop? How could weeds be eliminated without chemicals? Would biological additives to soil pay off? Could their grains be milled into flour? Would wine grapes grow well?

"If you're not trying something new and different, you're going to have a hard time moving forward in this industry," said Brent Uhlorn, the fourth generation on Uhlorn Family Farms near Cottonwood. "Our operation is always on the innovative edge and often times bucks the old school frame of mind when it comes to agriculture."

Brent manages the farm and is co-owner with his father, Darrel. They are guided by their motto – "Think outside of the box and be challenged."

Recent innovations complement their usual crops of grass seeds, wheat, barley, oats, chickpeas, peas, lentils, and canola.

This summer for the first time, they added a five-acre test plot of rice.

Their whole grains and flours recently started selling on the internet after four years of working on the idea. They work with a mill and sell oat, wheat and chickpea flour to restaurants and bakeries. They also sell rolled oats, whole wheat berries, and chickpeas.

"We were excited to finally get our flour on our website in January," Brent said. "Response at a trade show in Las Vegas was good, too."

He described a few other innovations. A few years ago, they planted 36 acres of sunflowers for birdseed, yielding about 576,000 sunflowers that were harvested with a combine. They are now a standard crop in their rotation.

They also planted 1,400 wine grape vines, which are doing well.

They rely on their canola fields for seasonal honey. They are experimenting with a seed terminator, a unit that fits on the back of a combine to pulverize weed seeds. Cattle graze on some fields to till soil mildly and add nutrients.

Curious about a farmer's record-setting yield of soybeans per acre, Brent met the Missouri producer, who shared his expertise.

"He told me about using biological stimulants to increase soil health and nutritional quality of food, so that got our business started with regenerative farming," Brent said.

Photo courtesy of Uhlorn Family Farms

Darrel and Mary Uhlorn have three children. The Uhlorns raise grass seeds, wheat, barley, oats, chickpeas, peas, lentils, canola, sunflowers, and 1,400 wine grape vines.

Impressed, the Uhlorns began researching biological soil additives and balancing biologics with chemical inputs on their diverse crops.

"We were already doing no-till planting, but I wanted to learn more about regenerative farming," Brent said.

With that in mind, the Uhlorns started using biological inputs in 2017.

"The goal is to have the best yields with minimal inputs and to stabilize soil nutrients," Brent said. "We work on getting better efficiency from products and balancing the biologics with chemical products. I still use some herbicides."

They have applied fish products, molasses, humic and fulvic acids to their fields. Those products are nourishing microbes, a farm's underground livestock, so they'll fix nitrogen and slow its release.

"I have a facility, too, so we can brew our own compost extracts," Brent said. "I can take 15 gallons of additives and turn them into 1,500 gallons."

Brent's advice to farmers who are thinking of using bio stimulants and live biologics is to be patient.

"Try it on a test strip. Depending on the soil, it takes about three to five years to see results," he said. "It's worth the wait, though, and the nutritional analysis of food is better in crops grown with biologics."

Besides being enthused about the flour and growing a new crop, the Uhlorns are excited about the farm's recent inclusion in 350,000 acres listed nationwide with Regenerative Farmers of America.

"We're proud of all the hard work we've done to be featured on that map," Brent posted on the farm's Facebook page. ■

Photo by Joel Benson

Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, speaks about issues facing farmers and ranchers Aug. 6 during a tour in East Idaho with Idaho Farm Bureau Federation members.

Farm Bureau members meet with Congressman Simpson

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation members recently spent a day and a half interacting and addressing major issues with Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho.

The time spent with Simpson gave regular Farm Bureau members a chance to ask the congressman questions or brief him on issues important to them.

"It was an opportunity for our members to get the congressman's eyes on some issues we're facing, such as depredation, water and forest management," said Cameron Hammond, IFBF's regional manager in East Idaho.

Simpson, who represents the state's agriculture-heavy 2nd congressional district, covered a wide array of issues important to both the nation and Idaho.

During a town hall style event Aug. 5, Simpson started off by making it clear he supports agriculture and understands how important it is to the state and nation.

"I love being with Farm Bureau," he told about 80 Farm Bureau members. "Idaho is still an agricultural state. It's an important industry and you guys do so much … I love to get out here because you guys are the salt of the earth. It's a very important industry."

According to USDA's Census of Agriculture, Idaho's 2nd Congressional District is a national powerhouse when it comes to agriculture. It includes 11,825 farms and

Photo by Joel Benson

Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, covered a wide range of issues while speaking with dozens of Idaho Farm Bureau Federation members Aug. 5.

ranches that generated $8.5 billion worth of farm-gate revenue in 2022.

The district ranked No. 11 overall among the nation's 435 congressional districts in total farm-gate revenue and among the top three in several individual agricultural commodities, including milk sales and potato and barley acreage.

IFBF Vice President Richard Durrant, a Meridian farmer, thanked Simpson for taking the time to visit with Farm Bureau members.

The organization appreciates the work that Simpson has done on agricultural issues, Durrant told fellow IFBF members. "He is very supportive of us in the ag world."

"We appreciate how responsive you are," IFBF Director of Government Affairs Braden Jensen told Simpson and his staff who joined him. "You always welcome us with open arms and we appreciate that."

During the town hall event, Simpson answered questions from Farm Bureau members and staff.

On tariffs, Simpson said: "I'm not a guy who likes tariffs. But, if some country's going to tariff our goods, then I'm OK with tariffing their goods at the same rate. That just seems fair."

The congressman also addressed the immigration issue and said he understands agriculture's need for a legal, reliable workforce and is working toward that goal.

"We have to be able to get a legal workforce for agriculture in this country," he said. "We have to address this immigration issue…."

Simpson was also asked how he could work with Farm Bureau to create some more water storage capacity in Idaho.

"That's a smart thing to do," he said. "We could be looking at increasing the capacity of some of the reservoirs that we currently have. The other thing is recharge. Recharge is vitally important … I think it's a smart thing to do."

He was asked what steps are being taken to delist grizzly bears from the Endangered Species List.

"The state of Idaho wants to delist grizzly bears nationwide … and I think the state of Idaho is right," Simpson said. "And I think we're starting to move in that direction. And I think you'll see that done."

When asked how quickly that was possible, Simpson said: "Hopefully, within the next three years."

On the subject of farmland loss, when Simpson was asked if anything can be

done to protect farm properties from the impacts of urbanization, he responded, "Don't sell it," which brought significant applause from the town hall audience.

He followed that comment up by making a point that respecting private property rights has to be a big part of the effort to stem the loss of farmland.

"The last thing you want to do is do something that will prevent you from, if you choose to sell it, losing out on your ability to make a profit off of the land that you've invested in," he said. "You don't want to go that direction."

The congressman was asked where he stood on the Make America Healthy Again movement.

"I actually like what MAHA is doing," he said. "I don't agree with everything they're doing. Overall, I think it's fine to review what we put in our foods and (see if it's impacting our health)."

On Aug. 6, Farm Bureau members whisked the congressman and his staff to different sites around East Idaho, where the subjects of grizzly bears, forest management and water storage were discussed.

Experts on these issues from the state of Idaho and the Idaho Legislature joined that tour to offer their insights on these topics.

At a stop in Ashton, rancher Brody Harshbarger spoke about the impact to his operation that wolves have had and how the state taking over management of the predators from the federal government has made a huge difference. The same thing needs to happen with grizzly bears, he said.

"We have to try to be more proactive if we are going to prevent some of these forest fires from happening. There's so much fuel … Somehow, we have to reduce fuel loads."

– Congressman Mike Simpson

Photo by Joel Benson

During a tour around East Idaho Aug. 6, Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, center with white shirt, discussed forest management issues with Idaho Farm Bureau Federation members.

"With the grizzly bears, we're not there yet," said Harshbarger, who is also an Idaho Fish and Game commissioner. "We need some management. We're just inundated with them. There's more than we need here."

Mike Edmonson, administrator of the Governor's Office of Species Conservation, said it is the policy of the state of Idaho to get grizzly bears delisted in the entire lower 48 states.

"We are pursuing all avenues to achieve that," he said. "What we really want is state management of bears."

Tour participants also traveled inside the heart of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest to discuss the need for better forest management. Better managing forests as a way to prevent some mega forest fires from happening was a main topic of discussion during this stop.

"We're on the verge of disaster up here in the forest unless we start logging," Harshbarger said. "We could be up here logging and getting funding for our schools. It seems such a shame not to be using this resource."

Simpson agreed.

"We have to try to be more proactive if we are going to prevent some of these forest fires from happening," the congressman said. "There's so much fuel … Somehow, we have to reduce fuel loads. We have to do more prescribed burns and that type of stuff."

Simpson told tour participants it's hard to get some members of Congress to understand the type of natural resource issues that were discussed during his Farm Bureau tour.

"There are truly members of Congress that think milk comes from a carton," he said. "They don't know it comes from a cow because they have never been on a farm. They don't have any idea what it is to live in a public lands state and they don't know what multiple-use is."

The final stop of the tour was at the site of the former Teton Dam, which collapsed in 1976, resulting in the deaths of several people and the flooding of much of that region.

There, several people, including some Idaho legislators, spoke of the need to create more water storage capacity in the state.

During the 2025 Idaho Legislature, lawmakers passed Senate Joint Memorial 101, which urges federal and state agencies to study and develop additional water storage solutions for Idaho, including the potential reconstruction of the Teton Dam.

Increased water storage could also include raising some existing reservoirs, doing more aquifer recharge or exploring smaller off-stream storage sites.

"We're open to an all-of-the above approach," Jensen said.

Rep. Rod Furniss, who represents District 31 in East Idaho, was the House sponsor of SJM 101.

During the Teton Dam site stop, he addressed the need to create more water storage in Idaho.

Rebuilding the Teton Dam is one possibility, if it makes sense and is safe, Furniss said. "And if not here, we need to find the place or places where we can store more water for crops, for recharge … to increase hydro power, and have more recreation opportunities to secure Idaho's economic future."

Furniss said about 2 million acre-feet of water leaves Idaho unused each year, enough to supply 8 million people for an entire year.

The reason that happens is simple, he said: "We don't have enough capacity – enough reservoirs, dams or recharge sites – to capture the spring runoff and store it for when it's needed later in the year."

"Meanwhile, our aquifers shrink, our farms are asked to grow more with less and our communities brace for another dry season," he said. "But it doesn't have to be this way."

Jeff Raybould, chairman of the Idaho Water Resource Board, said there are lots of places around the state where additional surface water storage could be built.

"We have to better manage our resource," he said. "We need to have more surety for water."

Rep. Britt Raybould, a farmer who represents District 34 in East Idaho, thanked IFBF for its help in securing an additional $30 million for water projects during the 2025 legislative session.

"Every dollar we invest in water easily pays back to the state ten times," she said.

Rep. Jerald Raymond, a rancher who represents District 31 in East Idaho, said the search for more water storage capacity could include the possibility of smaller, off-stream storage sites.

"Let's encompass all ideas when we do this study and think outside the box," he said.

During the Teton Dam site stop, Simpson told participants that water is very important to him. "If you need help in Washington, I'll be there to help," he said.

On the subject of potentially rebuilding the Teton Dam, he made it clear he would not be the one making the final decision.

"I'm going to do whatever … the people of Idaho want to do," he said. "But it certainly needs to be studied." ■

Photo by Sean Ellis

This is the site of the former Teton Dam. Initial discussions about possibly rebuilding it are going on right now and Idaho Farm Bureau Federation members recently discussed this issue with Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho.

Shelley hosts the original Spud Day celebration

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

SHELLEY – The potato is a humble and versatile thing. It grows underground, away from the limelight.

But in Shelley, the potato is revered and for one day a year here, it's the spud's time to shine and enjoy the spotlight.

The people of Shelley hold the potato in such high esteem, in fact, that on the third Saturday of every September – this year, that's Sept. 20 – literally the entire city turns out for the annual Spud Day celebration in honor of the Russet potato.

Bingham County is the epicenter of potato production in Idaho, which easily leads the nation in total spud production each year.

About 60,000 acres of potatoes are grown annually in Bingham County, many of them right around the Shelley area. This means close to 20 percent of the 14 billion pounds or so of spuds produced in Idaho annually are grown near Shelley.

Shelley Spud Day draws an estimated 12,000-15,000 people. The city of Shelley itself has a population of just over 5,000, so that means people in the surrounding area come out of the highways and byways to help the city celebrate the Idaho potato each year.

"It draws a crowd, that's for sure," said Shelley potato farmer Bryan Searle, president of Idaho Farm Bureau Federation. "It's really impressive how many people show up for that event each year."

Searle said Shelley area residents are very

LEFT: **Children participate in a "potato-picking" contest at the annual Spud Day celebration in Shelley in this file photo.** Submitted photos

"We grow a lot of potatoes right here and it's important to remind people of that and continue to celebrate that fact. The Spud Day celebration is a fun way to do that."

– Bryan Searle, Shelley farmer, IFBF president

A Spud Tug participant is on the verge of getting pulled into a giant pit of mashed potatoes in this file photo from a prior Spud Day event.

proud of the potato and the Spud Day event is an extension of that.

"We grow a lot of potatoes right here and it's important to remind people of that and continue to celebrate that fact," he said. "The Spud Day celebration is a fun way to do that."

The event is planned and organized by the Shelley-Firth Kiwanis Club, with help from the city and plenty of volunteers. During their weekly meeting, Kiwanis club members recently spoke to Idaho Farm Bureau Federation about the event.

The local high school sports teams are known as the "Russets," and pride in the community's potato roots was a major theme of the discussion.

"We're the Russets. How much more pride can you get than that?" said Kiwanis member Chris Zweifel.

"A lot of class reunions are planned around Spud Day," said Idaho Potato Commission CEO Jamey Higham. Like Searle, he attended high school in Shelley and was a Russet. "It's a huge deal for Shelley."

Many, if not most, kids who grow up in the Shelley area spend at least some time helping with the annual spud harvest. High schools in the area close for a few weeks each fall to facilitate this.

Kids working the spud harvest "is a rite of passage," said Kiwanis member Mer-Anda Miller. "I think every kid in Shelley should do it at least once. You have to appreciate your roots and where you come from."

The IPC's big Idaho potato truck has made several appearances at the event, as has Spuddy Buddy, the potato commission's mascot. They will again this year.

The day-long celebration includes several potato-themed activities such as potato sack races and a timed potato picking contest where participants try to put as many potatoes in a burlap sack as possible.

Kiwanis member Justin Maddux is a relative newcomer in Shelley, and he said he figured the potato picking contest would be a relaxed event.

Wrong.

"People take it very seriously," especially people who work on a farm, Maddux said. "They take a lot of pride in picking fast and winning the championship."

Higham said his favorite event of Spud Day is the potato picking contest.

"It's pretty competitive," he said.

The celebration includes a parade with dozens of entrants and a plethora of activities, including a tug-of-war contest that results in the losing team being pulled into a giant pit of mashed potatoes.

"The parade is the best part," said Kiwanis member Daryl James. "It's the biggest parade I've seen for a small community. It's just jammed with people."

For the tug-of-war event – Spud Tug – instant mashed potatoes are prepared in a cement mixer and then poured into a big hole. At least a few members of the losing teams end up in the pit.

The annual celebration, in its 97th year, provides free baked potatoes to participants and has attracted national attention over the years.

"Good Morning America" covered the event in 1990 and the 1991 Spud Day was covered in National Geographic Travel Magazine, New York Times and Better Homes and Gardens.

In 1993, ESPN showed live footage of the tug-of-war contest.

During a spud peeling contest in 1991, participants peeled 694.6 pounds of potatoes in 45 minutes, which bested the world record and earned them a spot in the Guinness Book of World Records.

The event is free, although parade entries and vendors are charged a fee. Any proceeds go back into the community, says Kiwanis member Sharylee Shanks.

For example, one year's proceeds were used to build a new batting cage for the high school. Another year's earnings were used to help build a pickleball court. ■

Serving the community: A farm family legacy

By Paige Nelson
For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Photos by Paige Nelson

Clark Family Farms consists of Adam Clark, left, Roger, and Alan.

At 39 years old, Roger Clark lost his father.

He'd grown up farming alongside his dad, Keith, and planned on attending college after he graduated. But it seemed like something always kept Roger from pursuing a college degree, whether it was his dad's broken leg or marriage or starting a family.

Finally, Roger decided to stay on the farm permanently. Little did he know, that time would be invaluable.

Becoming a full-time farmer was actually a dream come true, and Roger put the idea of college behind him. He married his sweetheart, Ann, started his family of three girls and two boys, and was even renting the farm from his parents before Keith passed; however, the death was still a shock to the whole family.

Although young at the time, Roger's two sons, Alan and Adam, were involved in the farm enough to realize things would be different from that point forward. The full responsibility of making the family farm work fell on Roger's young shoulders. He had Keith's legacy to uphold and an example to set for his own children.

He did both!

At young ages, both Alan and Adam knew farming was their future. It was up to Roger to create opportunities for his sons.

"We live in an area where there's not a lot of big farms, not a lot of acreage that you can get ahold of," explains Roger.

He could see that opportunities existed in custom farming. It was a way to supplement the farm's sales and update equipment.

The extra hours paid off.

"I ended up being able to rent some of the ground, or buy some of it, that we were actually doing custom work on," he says.

On the cattle side, Roger put up capital when his cousins wanted to sell their cattle and land interests. It was something he had seen his dad and grandfather do. Thanks to generations of experience, the Clark family knows opportunities don't come around often, so you jump on them when they do.

Today, Roger and his sons farm around 1,200 acres of grain and alfalfa near the small town of Menan in East Idaho. They do custom farming on additional acres in the nearby area. They also own a ranch and hold a forest service permit in Humphrey, on which they manage 500 head of Angus cattle.

When he was alive, Keith made it a priority to serve in the community and held a position on Menan Cooperative's board of directors. Roger also served 14 years on the Menan Co-op board that eventually became Valley Wide Cooperative.

Roger continued his education by attending local University of Idaho Extension programs and classes. After attending a few hay school and grain school events, Roger found himself involved in, and eventually graduated from, the Leadership Idaho Agriculture (LIA) program.

LIA launched Roger into serving within the Idaho Hay and Forage Association and the Idaho Grain Producers Association.

"You know, it seemed like you kind of get involved in a few things and there's more opportunities," Roger chuckles.

Like any other farmer, Roger didn't have free time to burn, but he did think it was important to invest in his livelihood, as well as his community, even if it took valuable time away from the crops and cattle.

"Being involved gives you a little more understanding of what's going on in the state, the different organizations, how they lobby the legislature," he explains.

Roger says it's important to him to have a nice place to live, work and raise a family. He feels drawn to doing his part to ensure those things happen. He was recently elected to his third term as a Jefferson County commissioner.

Roger sees how his connections and experiences have helped him arrive where he is today.

"I had a few people approach me and want to know if I would run for county commissioner," he recalls. "I've farmed all my life, and I think it was just something maybe a little different. Alan and Adam, at that point, were where they could do a lot of the stuff, somewhat take over. I think it was just the right time."

"Our perspective as farmers and ranchers gives us pretty good insight in the things that are going on in the county, budgeting, making things work. We need to be at the table."

– Roger Clark

Volunteering off-farm is a priority for the Clark family. Adam serves as chairman of the board of directors for Valley Wide Co-op. Alan is the current Jefferson County Farm Bureau president. Roger is in his second term as a Jefferson County commissioner.

The timing was right, but like any good farmer, Roger noticed some storm clouds on his community's horizon and couldn't stand by without doing his part.

"As you look at our state, even our county, you look at the growth that's coming. Agriculture's getting a little less influence all the time," Roger states. "I think it's good to have somebody that's involved in agriculture serve because one of the biggest industries in our state is agriculture.

"Our perspective as farmers and ranchers gives us pretty good insight in the things that are going on in the county, budgeting, making things work. We need to be at the table."

Like father like son — just as a love of farming runs strong in the Clark line, so does a willingness to serve.

Alan lives in Grandpa Keith's house and with his wife Sara, is raising four daughters. Working alongside his dad and brother, Alan specializes in the hay production and cattle management areas of the business.

He is also deeply involved in the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation (IFBF). Alan serves as Jefferson County Farm Bureau president and as the American Farm Bureau Federation Promotion and Education (P&E) Committee Chair. He recently retired as the IFBF P&E chair.

Alan says he's grown personally from his involvements.

"I've had to really learn to be able to communicate with others, express my feelings, my thoughts, my ideas, and just be able to get along with people," explains Alan. "I just feel like I've grown as a person a lot. I might not have been able to grow that way just staying home on the farm."

Following in Grandpa Keith's footsteps, Adam has served on the Valley Wide Co-op board of directors since he was 27. He has been the chairman of the board for seven years now. In addition to that position, he sits on the Valley Ag board and has seen the organization through the process of three company mergers.

Like his dad, Adam is a graduate of the LIA program and represents Valley Wide and its members on the Food Producers of Idaho board.

Adam and his wife Kylee have four children and are partners in a dance studio and own a cheer gym.

This is a lifestyle Adam pursues because, according to him, success on the farm is directly tied to what happens in Boise and throughout the state and nation.

"I can stay here and do the things that I want on the farm, but unless we're actively engaged in creating policy, we may become stagnant. I want to grow our operation to make sure that it's still relevant, you know, 20 years from now, and can support the next generation," says Adam.

In addition to their community and industry service roles, all three Clark men make time to fill positions within their church.

At this point the big question might be: Who stays home to run the farm?

"You know, Alan and Adam, they work well together because I tell them, I'm fine with them being involved, but they've got to work it out," says Roger. "I like to have them involved because I think it gives them a better understanding of what's going on."

He's seen his sons grow thanks to their leadership roles off the farm. Adam's more corporate role has increased his financial grasp and given him a clearer understanding of the farm's monetary standing.

Alan's role, says Roger, is to advocate for agriculture and be involved in finding solutions to the issues the ag industry faces.

"In a sense, they've kind of complemented one another, so they're not actually doing the same thing. They're able to share that with each other," Roger reflects.

Overall, it is Roger's hope that through his time spent strengthening, growing and operating his farm, as well as his investments in his community and industry, he will leave his operation in good standing for his sons and grandchildren to continue farming into the future. ■

Photos by Paul Boehlke

Idaho teachers visit the Moo-Riah Dairy near Melba.

Idaho Ag in the Classroom 'On the Road' teacher workshop

By Paul Boehlke
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

CANYON COUNTY – As the years go on, people are further and further disconnected from agriculture, said Cassidey Plum, the state director of Idaho Agriculture in the Classroom.

That's why it's important for organizations such as Ag in the Classroom to continue to educate people about where their food really comes from, she said.

The non-profit organization hosted its annual "On the Road" workshop July 15-16 for teachers from all over the state.

This is an opportunity for Ag in the Classroom to teach the teachers about agriculture so they can more effectively relay the truths about farming and ranching to their students.

"We are taking teachers out of the classroom and into the fields or different agri-business facilities across the state to give them a deeper understanding of Idaho agriculture," said Plum.

For example, she said, the tour took teachers to a dairy, where they got to see the whole process from start to finish and are now better equipped to explain the milk production process to their students.

"Just having students who might not exactly have careers in agriculture at least be agriculture literate is so important," Plum said.

This year's workshop was in the Treasure Valley in Southwest Idaho, and participants visited five different locations.

Participants saw milk being produced from cow to bottle at Moo-Riah Dairy, smelled fresh mint oil at a mint still at L&N Farms, and tasted a little wine at Bitner Vinyards, where they also learned about the importance of pollinator bees in agriculture.

On the second day, they toured the processing facilities at Owyhee Produce, visited an asparagus field, and learned about the sheep industry at Boise River Lamb.

For some of the teachers, it was their first time ever being on a farm, while others have been on multiple tours, like fifth grade teacher Diana Moser from Deary in North Idaho.

"What I love about Idaho Ag in the Classroom is that it truly connects kids to their food," said Moser. "When they see that onion in the grocery store, I like to show them and teach them what

all goes into having that onion go from the seed to the grocery store."

People today are four generations removed from the farm on average, so most of them don't know anything about what a farm is other than that it grows food or has animals on it, said Bailey Myers-Hartley, who handles agritourism and marketing for Owyhee Produce.

"We are extremely passionate about helping people become educated in where their food comes from, how it's grown and how it basically gets to (their) table," she said.

"If you take time to learn about that stuff, you're way more grateful for what gets to your table," Myers-Hartley added. "But also, you have a greater respect for the jobs that are being done around you."

Farm and ranch jobs may not necessarily seem as cool as being a pilot or fireman, "but it is something that's so necessary," she said. "And so having teachers that can come out and actually learn about it and then take it back to their classroom is extremely exciting for us."

About 95 percent of farms in America are family run farms and people don't realize that, "so I'm just really passionate about sharing that with everyone, but especially teachers, because every teacher has a scope of students that they then get to share it with," said Siska Reece of Moo-Riah Dairy.

"Kids are so much more likely to try their food if they know where it comes from," said Heather Jackson, a teacher at Lake Hazel Middle School in Boise. "I teach family consumer science (and) my goal this year is to be able to work with some kind of a farm group and maybe get some of their foods directly into the classroom so that we can mix some recipes with them."

Moser, who teaches fifth grade, said just telling students about something isn't enough, and one thing she loves about Ag in the Classroom is the resources it provides teachers.

"When kids can see that and have a visual and not just me standing there telling them about it, that's I think when it really clicks," she said.

The teachers involved in this year's tour said they were very grateful to producers for taking time to give them a little taste of their life.

TOP: **Teachers get a look at corn packing at Owyhee Produce in Parma.** ABOVE: **A Jersey cow poses for a close-up at Moo-Riah Dairy.**

"The blood, sweat and tears that they put into (farming) …" Moser said. "This isn't a job for them, this is a life."

Jackson said she loves the program and tries to do it every couple of years. "It's so much fun … and I try to convince all of my teacher friends to do it with me."

"Even as many tours as I've been on, I've never walked away from one not learning something new," said Moser. "You're always going to learn something new, something you didn't know, and something you can take back to your kids and teach them about Idaho agriculture. So, I can't encourage it enough. It is phenomenal." ■

‘Tractor’ raffle has become a visual symbol of Idaho FFA

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Photos by Sean Ellis

Lt. Gov. Scott Bedke, center, stands in front of the grand prize of this year’s Idaho FFA raffle – a 2024 Polaris Trail 900 Ultimate – which went to Glenn Dodge of Parma. Bedke, who randomly drew the winning ticket, is joined by Sid Freeman, left, who created the raffle, Notus High School FFA advisor Kevin Barker, and two FFA members, who helped run this year’s raffle drawing.

STAR – This year’s Idaho FFA “tractor” raffle program raised more than $100,000 for the Idaho FFA program this year.

Maybe just as importantly, the raffle program continues to raise awareness of how important the FFA program itself is.

“The awareness that we’ve gained from this program is immense,” said Carly Jordan, executive director of the Idaho FFA Foundation. “Our raffle efforts have had a huge impact on just gaining awareness about what we’re trying to do through the FFA organization.”

Half of the money from each raffle ticket sold goes to fund scholarships for FFA students heading to post-secondary education. The other half goes back to the FFA chapter that sold the ticket.

“It’s a win-win for both,” said Notus High School ag teacher and FFA advisor Kevin Barker. “It’s a fantastic program.”

“When we give away tens of thousands of dollars each year for college scholarships, it has a huge impact on these kids that are going on to post-secondary education; it’s fantastic for them to have that extra support,” he said. “The other $10 of the ticket goes back to the chapter that sold the ticket and that’s a fantastic thing for local chapters to be able to do things that they need to do on a local level.”

There are currently more than 6,400 FFA members in 102 chapters across Idaho.

As he randomly drew the names of this year’s raffle winners from a large bucket July 8, Lt. Gov. Scott Bedke thanked the people who supported the FFA program with their pocketbooks.

“Thank you to the (thousands of) Idahoans that bought the raffle tickets,” he said on a cattle ranch near Star. “This signals statewide support for a very, very worthy cause and that is the FFA Foundation and the scholarships that it provides.”

The winner of this year’s grand prize, a 2024 Polaris Trail 900 Ultimate, is Glenn Dodge of Parma.

The second-place winner, of a Traeger Grill courtesy of Campbell Tractor Co., is Elmer Thomas of Nampa.

Sherri Babbitt of Boise won the third-place prize, a $500 D&B Supply gift card courtesy of D&B.

Fourth-place winner, Angela Demeyer of Wilder, won a cooler and BBQ essentials basket courtesy of Valley Wide Cooperative.

Bedke, a rancher and farmer from Oakley, said FFA students are the future of agriculture and he pointed out that when he gets stacks of resumes, the ones with FFA experience float to the top of the pile.

“Whenever we get stacks of resumes, we always set aside the ones from individuals that have FFA experience because we know they know how to work, we know they are accomplished, we know they know how to speak, how to show up on time and do all the soft skills that our workforce needs,” he said.

“I’m telling you, your experience in FFA will set you apart from others,” he added.

Later, Sid Freeman, a Middleton farmer who started the raffle program with his wife, Pam, in 2011, said the lieutenant governor hit the nail on the head with those comments.

“With businesses throughout the nation that know what FFA is all about, if a student comes to them and has their FFA experiences on their resume, usually those will sift up to the top of the selection pile,” he said. “Today, the word is out and people are looking for these kinds of people for employees.”

With the help of ag-related businesses, Sid and Pam Freeman in 2010 refurbished a 1941 Farmall tractor and hauled it around the state on a borrowed trailer to promote it. It was raffled off in April 2011.

That was the humble beginning of the raffle.

After the first raffle in 2011, other farms

and agribusinesses donated tractors in subsequent years. In 2020, raffle organizers started offering an off-road utility vehicle as the grand prize as a way to appeal to a wider potential audience of ticket buyers.

Also in 2020, FFA officials raised ticket prices from $10 to $20 and began directing half of the money back to individual FFA chapters.

At that time, "People were questioning whether the public would pay $20 for a ticket," Freeman said. "But once they find out 50 percent of that ticket goes directly back to that FFA chapter that's selling it, they have no problem whatsoever."

Heading into its 16th year, the raffle is now a visual symbol of the Idaho FFA program.

"The awareness that we've gained from this program is immense," said Jordan.

She said the "impact of the FFA program is hard to measure just because it's so vast."

"There are benefits to the workforce, benefits in just developing that person as a leader, developing their confidence and technical skills, benefits to teaching kids from an urban background about agriculture," Jordan said.

"FFA is not just cows and plows," Jordan said. "FFA can be a great thing in just growing well-rounded citizens and responsible employees. It really turns out some great individuals into our communities." ■

Lt. Gov. Scott Bedke draws a winning ticket for this year's FFA "tractor" raffle.

Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins

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Climate weirding?

By Chris Schnepf
University of Idaho

Many discussions about climate change revolve around physics – increasing temperatures, lengthening fire seasons, more extreme weather events, volume and timing of snowpack, etc.

Those phenomena are very important. But some of the things that may affect us most, especially those of us working in forestry, range management or agriculture, are where physical changes meet biology, ecology, and phenology. Such phenomena are sometimes referred to as "climate weirding."

My first exposure to climate weirding was with reports of declining Alaska yellow cedar. Many Alaskan coastal cedar were dying and foresters were struggling to identify the causes. Pathologists investigated the issue but were not able to identify any particular fungus killing the cedars.

Then someone noticed many of the dying trees were on sites that had been seeing shrinking snowpack depth and duration in recent years. Eventually, scientists concluded that Alaska yellow cedars were declining primarily because their roots were no longer insulated by snow, though drainage was also a factor. For more information, see https://www.fs.usda.gov/pnw/pubs/pnw_gtr917.pdf.

Some of the weirdest things we might see could be associated with insects. When I sit in on entomology sessions of recent forestry conferences, I'm often struck about how much research and discussion revolves around how different insects' behaviors and geographic ranges are changing or may change in response to changes in temperature or length of growing season.

One Idaho example is a moth called Cydia laricina. Until 2018, this wood boring moth had not been documented in Idaho – only in Montana over 100 years ago. It was likely here, but we had not noticed it, because it had not been causing significant problems.

But then we started getting reports of Cydia larvae killing tops of 5-inch larch and killing sapling larch outright. This is painful for foresters because larch is a valuable tree for lumber and is our most resistant species to the number one tree-killer in northern Idaho – root diseases. The phenomenon is currently being researched – it appears that other insects and disease and drought could also be a factor with the affected larch. For more information, see www.idl.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/02/Cydia-Fact-Sheet-508cjw.pdf.

Another example of emerging weirding in Idaho forests is the behavior of wood boring beetles. Idaho has many species of wood boring beetles (e.g., flat and round-headed woodborers). They are generally considered beneficial, to the extent they help break down dead and dying trees, hastening their decay and reduction in fire risk. What is becoming weird is how wood borers are increasingly killing green conifers, perhaps in association with drought and root disease.

Pine engraver beetle (Ips pini – the bark beetle notorious for reproducing in green pine slash) is also being monitored closely. This insect typically produces two generations per year in northern Idaho and three generations per year in southern Idaho. In recent years, entomologists have seen isolated evidence of partial third generations of Ips in the panhandle. If that becomes a new normal, we may need to adjust our standard management recommendations to reduce tree mortality from Ips.

Some climate weirding could be related to phenology: the study of the timing and annual life cycles of plants, animals, etc. See: www.usanpn.org.

For example, an insect lifecycle could become out of sync with the plant it feeds on. Or an insect predator or parasite could become out of sync with the insects it feeds on. Some of these changes could be beneficial (a pest insect becoming less of a problem, if emergence is no longer synched with growth stage at which its' host is most vulnerable).

Others could be more challenging (e.g., if predators or parasites of an insect become out of sync with a prey species that is a problem for us and that prey species populations growing larger as a result).

The phenology of trees could also create some weird effects. For over 75 years, foresters have understood that, depending on species, trees may perform badly if planted on sites that are too far removed in both latitude and elevation from where the seeds came from.

ABOVE: **Changes in climate could cause insects and diseases that are not usually a problem to kill trees more regularly.** Idaho Department of Lands photo; LEFT: **"Off-site" trees often grow poorly.** Photo by Chris Schnepf

One of the best examples of this are "off-site" ponderosa pine plantations planted in the 1930s on sites scattered across northern Idaho. Some of those seed sources are said to have been as far away as eastern Montana or even the Black Hills.

The striking thing about those plantations has not been that many of those trees died, it was how ravaged they were by needle diseases. Needle diseases are common in Idaho, but the effects are usually temporary.

U.S. Forest Service research efforts have studied the phenology of Douglas-fir and other species (see www.fs.usda.gov/pnw/pubs/journals/pnw_2016_harrington001.pdf).

They found that some colder site seed sources need a chilling requirement to break bud in the spring. I have observed the same weird phenomenon with subalpine fir in my yard but did not have a plausible explanation until I read this research. Douglas-fir is probably the first species I would expect to see acting "off-site" (e.g., unprecedented needle diseases) as it has the narrowest seed transfer guidelines of any of our native conifer species.

In public discourse, there has been a tendency to look at forest ailments as being completely about climate or not at all related to climate change. For example, on the question of wildland fires, public debates are often framed as fires being entirely due to climate change or, conversely, fires being due to fuels and stand density with climate rejected as a factor. On many fires, one can make a case that both forces are at work in varying degrees.

Looking at longer term trends is also important. One big flooding year isn't of itself proof of climate change, but if you get the "50-year flood" in four of ten years, something weird is going on whether it be driven by watershed activities, climate, or both.

The primary goal of this column is to suggest keeping our eyes open and cultivating an open mind to whether changing climate could be a factor in anything we are seeing that seems unprecedented. Understanding causes is critical to making good decisions regarding alternatives to dealing with an issue.

All of this could also evolve over time. In the end, we must learn to flexibly adapt to these phenomena as they unfold.

That is probably going to require more management activity rather than less in Idaho forests, particularly around reducing density and favoring a diversity of the best long-term adapted tree species and seed sources. ■

Thanks to Gina Davis, Erika Eidson and Hannah Hollowell for their feedback on this article.

(Chris Schnepf is an area extension educator in forestry for the University of Idaho in Bonner, Boundary, Kootenai and Benewah counties. He can be reached at cschnepf@uidaho.edu.)

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Protecting our dams: the Idaho way forward

By Lt. Gov. Scott Bedke

During my legislative career, my primary focus was always natural resource and water policy. That has not changed as I serve as your lieutenant governor.

I have learned that decisions about water require deliberate debate and collaboration, because they shape the very economy and way of life on which we all depend. Working with those who are directly impacted has been crucial for success.

I was, of course, baffled when the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, while traveling Idaho to promote President Trump's "Make American Healthy Again" policy, called for dam removal.

President Trump's position is clear. According to a June 12 White House Fact Sheet, "Dam breaching would have resulted in reduced water supply to farmers, eliminated several shipping channels, had devastating impacts to agriculture, increased energy costs, and eliminated recreational opportunities throughout the region."

Any changes to this policy of opposing dam removal would blatantly undermine Idaho's hard-fought efforts to preserve and protect our water sovereignty.

I have seen firsthand how our sovereignty over water resources lies at the very heart of our state's identity, our prosperity, and our way of life. Idaho's waterways are lifelines for our agricultural communities, urban centers and treasured wild landscapes.

The decisions we make about our water today will determine the future of our children, our farms and our industries.

Idaho's dams, although often misunderstood, are essential pieces of Idaho's infrastructure. They provide clean hydroelectric power, support irrigation that feeds millions, facilitate navigation and commerce, and offer vital flood control.

Calls to breach these dams ignore their irreplaceable role in sustaining not just our economy but our communities and heritage.

That is why I have been proud to work in alignment with President Trump's approach: recognizing the strategic, economic and environmental importance of these dams while steadfastly defending Idaho's sovereignty over our resources.

President Trump's policy to maintain and invest in existing hydropower infrastructure is a pragmatic acknowledgement that our state's prosperity and resilience depend on a reliable water system.

Protecting Idaho's water sovereignty means defending local decision-making. It means ensuring that policies affecting our rivers and reservoirs are crafted by those who know Idaho best – Idahoans themselves.

For too long, out-of-state interests have pushed for sweeping changes that would devastate our agricultural base and undermine the stability of our energy grid. We cannot cede control of our vital resources to distant bureaucracies or to ideologically driven lawsuits.

In standing up for the continued operation of our dams, we are standing up for Idaho's future – preserving jobs, economic opportunity and the independent spirit that makes our state unique.

Submitted photo

Lt. Gov. Scott Bedke

'Protecting Idaho's water sovereignty means defending local decision-making. It means ensuring that policies affecting our rivers and reservoirs are crafted by those who know Idaho best – Idahoans themselves.'

We are demonstrating our determination to keep Idaho water under Idaho control.

As we look ahead, I invite all Idahoans to join me in reaffirming our commitment to water sovereignty and to pragmatic policies that secure our prosperity for generations to come.

With determination and unity, we can protect these critical resources that make Idaho great. ■

Photos by Sean Ellis

Researchers from several different universities got an early glimpse of University of Idaho's Deep Soil Ecotron May 29.

Deep Soil Ecotron is close to going operational

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

MOSCOW, Idaho – Scientists know very little about deep soil. University of Idaho researchers are building a facility they believe will change that.

With help from a $19 million grant from the U.S. National Science Foundation, the University of Idaho is building a Deep Soil Ecotron that will allow scientists to study soil at depths of up to 10 feet.

Most soil research now looks at the first foot or so of soil.

Deep soil – further below the ground than the first few feet of soil – is one of the last research frontiers, says U of I Professor Michael Strickland, the project's lead principal investigator. It's akin to studying space or the ocean floor, he adds.

"It really is a one-of-a-kind facility," he says. "This is the only deep soil ecotron in existence."

A focus on the top foot of soil is really what has driven the science on soil research, Strickland adds.

"It's just this real big opportunity to explore soils like we've never explored them before," he says.

"If you have an idea, you can come in here and test it out," says Zachary Kayler, an assistant professor of soil and water systems and co-director of

the project. "That's what this facility is really about. I have lots of questions about soil that I want to answer specifically and that's exciting."

The $25 million Deep Soil Ecotron will contain up to 24 "eco-units" which will basically be huge columns used to study soil cores. They will include above-ground plants and below-ground organisms such as insects and microbes.

These eco-units will allow researchers to control a range of variables, from temperature to water to exposure to carbon dioxide.

The nine-ton eco-units, known as lysimeters, will be heavily instrumented and give researchers the ability to control environmental conditions such as temperature, soil moisture and gases. According to university officials, these lysimeter units should be fully installed this fall and the project should be completed and ready to accommodate research projects by the fall of 2026.

The ecotron, which will accommodate soil temperatures ranging from 23 degrees to 104 degrees, is located in the J.W. Martin Laboratory on U of I's Moscow campus.

Researchers will be able to monitor experiments in real time and manipulate variables within lysimeter units remotely using their cell phones.

Kayler says the facility's ability to control environmental conditions will allow researchers to do all kinds of experiments, such as accelerate seasonal cycles so they can test several different varietals within one year.

Kayler says scientists could also "go back in time" and recreate previous conditions, such as drought or a really wet year, and see if the actions taken by farmers to mitigate these conditions were helpful or not.

"Being able to control these systems, through time, is really an awesome part about this facility," he says.

Strickland says the work done at the ecotron could result in all types of possible benefits to farmers and ranchers, including how to make sure fertilizer applied to the soil isn't wasted.

"That comes down to the bottom line for … farmers," he says.

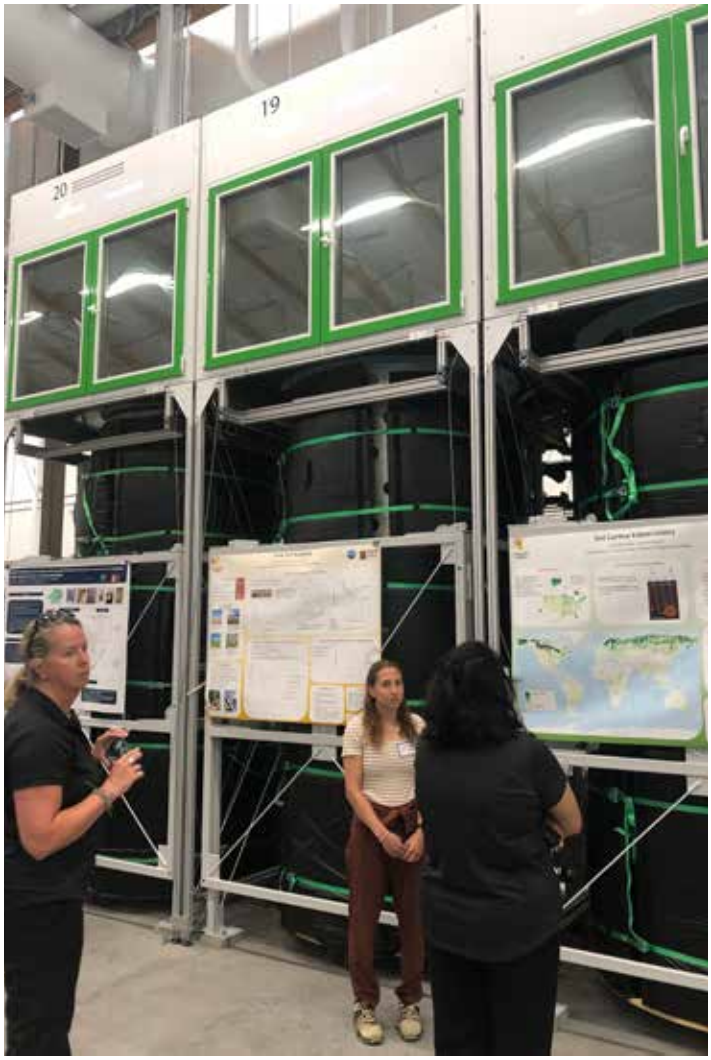
Farmers are constantly being told about a variety of products they can apply that will improve yields or soil, Strickland says. "We can test that here to see … what are the things that are cost-effective and what are the things that are not."

In late May, the university held a soft opening for the facility. In attendance were dozens of researchers from U of I, as well as other universities that will help create a national network of scientists who will conduct experiments at the facility.

Michael Parrella, who in June retired as dean of U of I's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, told these researchers that the ecotron facility will help scientists address some of the most important issues that farmers and ranchers face, including soil health and water use.

"There's no question soil and water will be two of the biggest issues facing Idaho and Idaho agriculture in the future," Parrella told the participants. "This facility will put Idaho on the map as a global leader in soil research."

Allowing farmers to minimize inputs while maximizing yields and profit will be a main goal of the facility, he says.



University of Idaho's Deep Soil Ecotron, shown under development here, will allow scientists to study soil at depths never done before.

There are only 13 ecotron facilities in the world and none go close to the soil depths planned at the U of I facility, according to U of I officials, who say that plans are also in the works to use the ecotron to evaluate imaging technology using soundwaves to detect objects such as tree roots below ground without having to dig.

North Idaho farmer Robert Blair, who serves on the CALS soil and water systems advisory board, says he attended the soft opening to show support for the university's vision for the ecotron.

As a farmer, he is hopeful the work done at the facility will help answer some important agronomic questions.

"We almost know more about the surface of the moon or our oceans than we do about our soils," he says. "As a grower, I am extremely excited about the potential this facility has to help us better manage our farming practices. It will allow us to obtain answers to questions farmers have been asking for a long time."

Ecotron scientists began collecting the first soil samples for the facility around the state this summer.

"This is going to be really exciting," Strickland says. ■

Falling NASS survey responses threaten data

By Bernt Nelson and Samantha Ayoub
AFBF economists

Countless stakeholders including farmers, university Extension services, researchers and policymakers rely on the data USDA has collected for more than 150 years through agencies and programs including the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) and the Economic Research Service (ERS).

An important element of research, price discovery and market integrity, good data is a critical part of a robust, well-functioning agricultural economy.

USDA is considered the gold standard for data collection globally but decreasing responses to USDA's farmer surveys is putting the integrity of this data at risk.

This Market Intel will evaluate the changes in response rates over time for several key surveys, with a focus on three NASS examples: the Crop Production Annual Summaries report, the March Cattle On Feed report and the November Farm Labor Survey.

It's all about data

Paid for by tax dollars, USDA's data and reports are available to a massive number of public and private stakeholders.

USDA collects data in a variety of ways. For example, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) relies on producer-reported data during enrollment for programs such as Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage.

Other agencies, such as NASS, often rely on data collected through various surveys including USDA's Census of Agriculture, which occurs every five years. NASS alone conducts hundreds of surveys every year, ranging from county-level production to cattle on feed.

Surveys responses: timing is everything

One of the biggest challenges to getting good survey response rates is timing. Unfortunately, many survey collection periods overlap with farmers' busiest times. For example, leading up to the June 30 planted acreage report, NASS contacted nearly 92,000 farmers across the nation to collect data to determine planted crop acres as of June 1.

This overlaps with the end of planting season and spraying season for many row crop farmers. This survey is critical because it helps determine expected acreage, the foundation for estimating future supply for several major U.S. commodities.

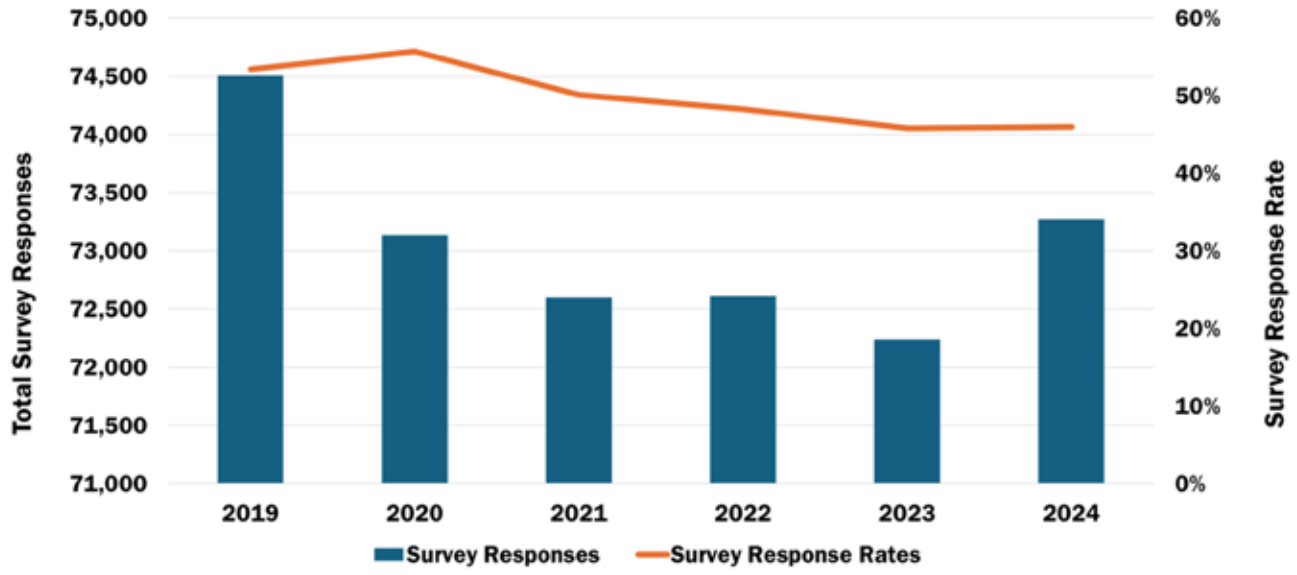
The weaker the survey response rates, the less accurate the data.

Crop production

Estimates for row crop acreage and production come from USDA's quarterly Agricultural Production survey issued in March, June, September and December in all states other than Hawaii. This data, published in the Crop Production Annual Summaries, is used widely due to the wide swath of information it contains.

It is used by farmers to make decisions about marketing or storing grain, financial institutions for analyzing credit decisions,

FIGURE 1. Crop Production Annual Summaries
Response Rates and Total Responses 2019 - 2024

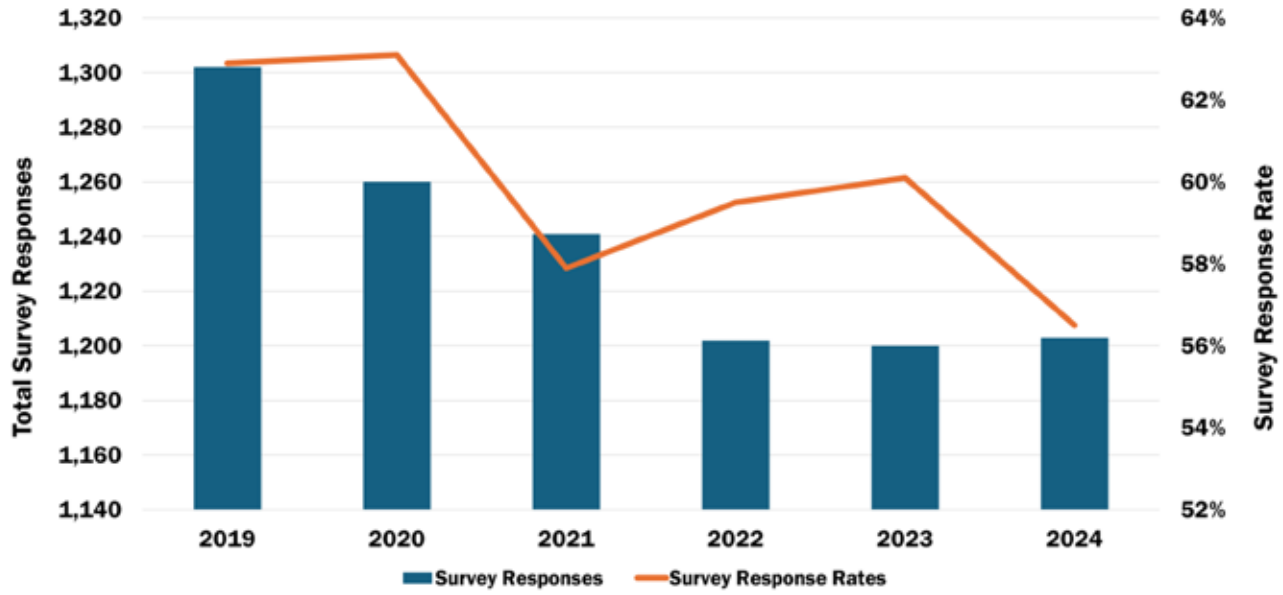


American Farm Bureau Federation

Data Source: USDA-NASS Methodology and Quality Measures

FIGURE 2. March Cattle on Feed

Response Rates and Total Responses 2019 - 2024



American Farm Bureau Federation®

Data Source: USDA-NASS Methodology and Quality Measures

industry analysts for developing forecasts and many more.

This makes data integrity crucial. Response rates for these surveys have fallen from 80%-85% in the 90s to just 46% in 2024. Notably, between 2019 and 2024 the response rate dropped below 50% for the first time with fewer than 74,000 responses out of an average of 148,000 surveys issued since 2020.

Cattle on feed

USDA's monthly Cattle on Feed report estimates the inventory of cattle on feed, cattle placed into feedlots, cattle marketed, and other disappearance by weight class. This report is important because it provides estimates for cattle in the pipeline for beef production.

Stakeholders rely heavily on this data for beef cattle price discovery and market decisions for all levels of production, from the farmer or rancher all the way to the retailer. Surveys for this report are issued to farmers and ranchers with feedlots with a capacity of 1,000 head or more in 17 states.

For quality measures, USDA uses the March report as a benchmark. The total number of March surveys sent to farmers and ranchers by USDA has increased by 3%, from 2,070 to 2,129 since 2019. During the same period, total responses have fallen by 6%, from over 1,300 down to about 1,200 for an overall response rate drop of 8% since 2019.

Survey response rates for this market-moving report have steadily declined, slipping from over 62% in 2019 to just above 56% in 2024, edging closer to a concerning 50% threshold. As fewer feedlot operators respond to USDA's benchmark March survey, confidence in cattle supply data used for price discovery and market decisions becomes increasingly fragile.

Farm labor

USDA's Farm Labor report is an annual publication containing regional data for all hired, unpaid and self-employed workers directly hired by U.S. farms and ranches (excluding Alaska), including wage rates.

The Farm Labor survey has crucial policy implications as it is used by the Department of Labor (DOL) to establish minimum wage rates, known as the Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR), for the H-2A temporary agricultural guestworker program. Because of flaws in using this survey as a policy discovery tool, NASS has tried multiple changes to the survey over the years.

In 2019, NASS added additional questions on base wage rates – those excluding incentive pay, overtime pay, etc. – to try to better serve DOL's use of the survey as an indicator of base wages across the country.

To accommodate these extra questions, as well as to include more information on wages, NASS increased their sample size to over 35,000 surveys. These surveys are divided among the 18 state and multistate regions by which the data is aggregated and reported.

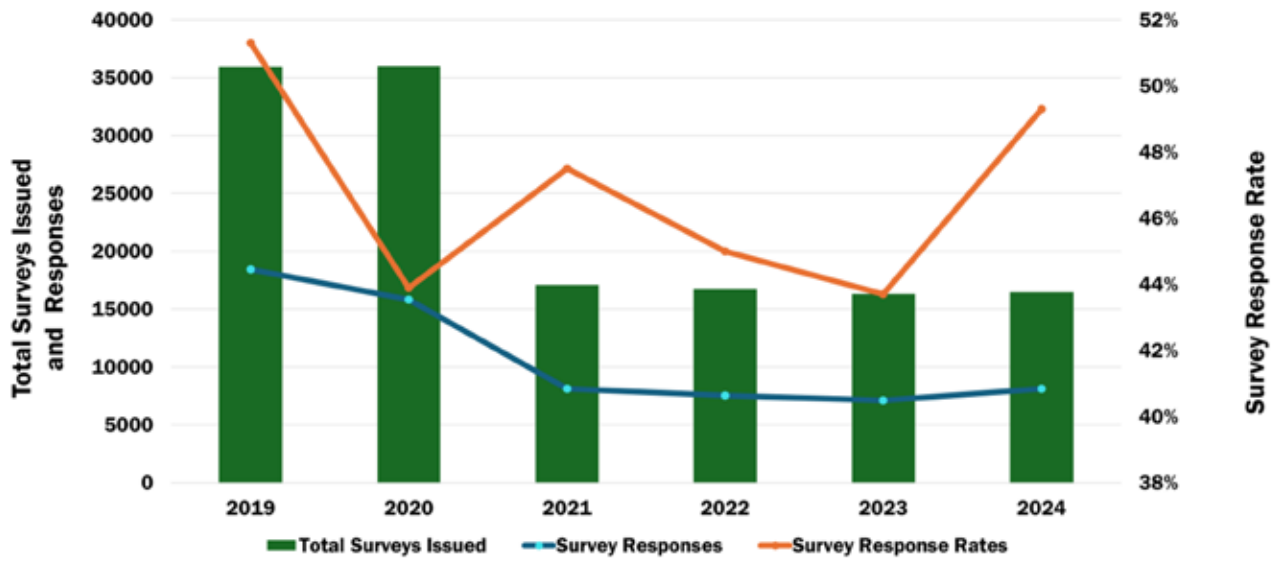
The survey historically had survey response rates of over 50% or 60%. However, when the survey sample increased to 36,000 surveys in 2020, the response rate declined to less than 44%.

NASS abandoned their new methodology after only two years and reverted to a sample size of only 17,000. This is still above the historic average sample size of 12,000 surveys. Yet response rates have not recovered.

As wages in the Farm Labor report – and the H-2A AEWR – continue to volatilely increase compared to nonfarm wages, many farmers view the survey with increased skepticism. As of the May

FIGURE 3. Nov. Farm Labor Survey

Total Surveys Issued, Survey Responses and Response Rates 2019 - 2024



American Farm Bureau Federation

Data Source: USDA-NASS Methodology and Quality Measures

2025 survey, the response has again decreased, dropping 4 percentage points from the November 2024 survey.

The trends in the Farm Labor survey are a prime example of how lack of transparency, falling data quality and improper use can weaken industry trust, participation and expectations for public data.

Falling survey response impacts

Among the many reasons falling response rates are a problem, perhaps the most glaring is the declining data integrity that goes along with it. Lower response rates could lead to lower accuracy. If too few responses are collected for any certain statistic, NASS will remove that statistic from public data to maintain confidentiality for farmers that did respond.

If a certain group or demographic has a particularly high number of responses compared to another, this can also lead to added bias.

Reliable survey data helps keep markets fair and competitive. USDA is the gold standard in agricultural data publications that are used for price setting across the globe. A decline in data quality could lead to less reliance on U.S. data, reducing global competitiveness.

Price discovery is the process where buyers and sellers negotiate and agree on a price for agricultural commodities. It involves the interaction of supply and demand, as well as other market factors, to determine the market price for a certain good. Less reliable data leads to less transparent markets, which can cause problems for price discovery.

Efforts to improve survey response rates

NASS has taken several steps to attempt to increase survey response rates. In the past, NASS issued surveys by mail. NASS began offering surveys online in the early 2000s. Online surveys cut down on time and cost of data collection for farmers and NASS alike.

NASS has streamlined the process by developing shorter questionnaires and expanding communications to include email and text messaging. These methods are far more time-efficient and cost-effective than the in-person requests and phone calls that used to be standard.

NASS has also enhanced data analysis methods and outreach. Lastly, NASS seeks to educate farmers on the importance of survey responses. It takes time to fill out these surveys, but robust survey response rates are integral to keeping USDA data the gold standard of agricultural data.

Conclusions

Most of the data published by USDA relies on farmers stopping their daily work to respond to surveys, which is no small ask. Surveys compete with weather, veterinary emergencies and a variety of endless seasonal farm activities.

This competition for time has led to a major decline in response rates to surveys that produce the data that farmers rely on to make decisions on a daily basis.

Though USDA has made some improvements to surveys, response rates for many surveys continue to decline. USDA leadership should continue to examine ways to increase participation, and data reliability, without imposing more burdens on the already busy growers whom the data is designed to serve. ■

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Idaho Preferred provides resources that simplify supporting Idaho's agricultural community and help you enjoy delicious, Idaho-grown products that showcase the peak of harvest freshness and contribute significantly to our quality of life.

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Idaho State Department of Agriculture

Classifieds

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2006 Keystone Cougar 29ft 5th Wheel. The exterior color is white with a neutral pallet on the inside. There are two slides in very good condition. There is an onboard generator and tons of storage and other goodies. It is a must see. Call Kent at 208-550-1107

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40 ft. REDWOOD 5th-Wheel RV, 4 slide-outs, 6-point automatic hydraulic leveler, 2 Roof-top Air Conditioners, Couch, 2 Recliners, 3 TVs, Fireplace,Commercial-size Refrigerator-Freezer w/Ice-Cube Dispenser, Dishwasher, Central Vacuum System, 2 Electronic Awnings 2016 Used only 9 month sOriginal Tag $132,480. Original Owners asking $59,000. 208-376-7662 or 208-275-9201. Pictures Available

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2002 Sportsman 25 ft. 5th wheel RV. This is the best kept used RV I have ever seen. One slide-out from the dining area and with a couch on it! Door opens into an efficient kitchen with Refrigerator, Stove, Oven, microwave. Bathroom has shower and tub. Queen Bed. Ample storage throughout. Nice awning on entry side. $10,000 OBO. 208-376-7662 or 208-275-9201. Pics available.

AUTO

1973 Kenworth 50th anniversary edition dump truck. Cummins 903 engine, 15 speed, Hendrickson rear spring 34,000 rears, 12,000 front axel, 15' bed, air age with side swing. 80,000 steel frame, extra parts. This truck is ready to work. $25,000. Call 208-860-0526.

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Wanted old Idaho Patches! Farm Bureau, Farming, Hunting, Idaho Cattlemen Assoc, Idaho Fish and Game. Top Dollar Paid! Call, email, or text pics. Rusty Kramer idahotrapguy@hotmail.com 208-870-3217

I pay top dollar for any type antique advertising signs or promotional items. Will also buy complete estates or complete collections. Let me know what you have. I also do Classic Car appraisals and Antique appraisals. Call or Text Tom 208-867-9357 I'm in Southern Idaho

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Paying cash for old cork top embossed bottles and some telephone insulators as well as other vintage and antique items. Call Randy. Payette, Id. 208-740-0178.

Wanted: WWI, WWII, and Vietnam war souvenirs (medals, daggers, flags, uniforms, etc.) Located in SE Idaho. Call or text 208-201-3351

Paying cash for German & Japanese war relics/souvenirs! Pistols, rifles, swords, daggers, flags, scopes, optical equipment, uniforms, helmets, machine guns (ATF rules apply) medals, flags, etc. 208-405-9338.

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Episode 88 - Roots of Forestry

Garrett Kleiner thinks more people should consider leaving traditional occupations in an office setting for a career in forestry. He loves being in nature and working with individuals to plan forest management.

What may surprise some is that many forestry jobs are in the private sector. Garrett, a consulting forester with Inland Forest Management, explains how forestry works today and how it has advanced over the decades. He advocates for the next generation to take over, keeping our forests healthy and sustainable.