Idaho Farm Bureau
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Raising BEEF In Idaho

The Zipline

By Zippy Duvall
President, American Farm Bureau Federation

Modern agriculture puts soil health first

I love springtime on the farm. Everything is fresh and green. Everywhere you look, you see life. It's a time of renewal, of regeneration.

Really that is what modern agriculture is about year-round. But springtime brings this cycle into full technicolor on the farm.

When I look out on my farmland, I am reminded that it hasn't always been this lush and green. It has taken years of hard work and dedication to get us to this point.

I am proud of how my family has worked to renew the soil and bring life back to these rolling hills. The story on my farm can be repeated hundreds, thousands, and even millions of times over.

It's the story of modern agriculture. While terms like climate-smart, sustainability, and now regenerative have become buzzwords, these are all words for what farmers have been doing for decades: protecting our natural resources and promoting soil health.

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The President's Desk

By Bryan Searle
President, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Ag Day event highlights Idaho agriculture

National Agriculture Day was held March 18 this year and in Idaho it was celebrated in the state's Capitol building. What a special event and celebration this is.

Numerous Gem State farm and ranch groups set up booths in the second-floor rotunda of the Capitol for this event. Surrounding those booths were dozens of displays giving visitors a small taste of Idaho's expansive agriculture industry.

Manning those booths were members of Idaho's agriculture industry who were eager to answer questions and help teach people about the farm or ranch industries they represent.

Members of the public, as well as many legislators, visited those booths and hopefully learned something about Idaho agriculture.

My hope is that if nothing else, people at least left with a feeling of how massive and important Idaho's farming and ranching industry is.

For example, did you know that there are 22,000-plus farmers and ranchers in Idaho? Or that we lead the nation not only in potato

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Inside Farm Bureau

By Zak Miller
CEO, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Lessons learned from cows

As a resident of a state with more cows than people, and as a citizen who has been involved with bovines for my entire conscious life, it would be challenging and unenjoyable to view life without the experiences and lessons I have gained from interacting with the largest mammal population in Idaho – cows.

Interacting with cattle can lead to numerous successes and failures. Everyone involved with cows has their unique experiences, achievements, and stories to share.

It would be unwise to claim definitively what lessons each person can derive from cattle. Therefore, I will share a few lessons I have learned or am continually striving to understand as I engage with some of Idaho's 2.49 million head of cattle.

1. Cows do everything their way

From a distance, this statement appears incorrect. The herd seems to behave similarly, whether it's five or 5,000. This makes sense because, as herd animals, cows tend to avoid standing out;

See **MILLER,** page 6

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Members of a Japanese trade team tour the Gould ranch in Buhl April 3.

Japanese beef trade team visits Idaho

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – A trade team from Japan spent some time in Idaho April 2-4 learning about the state's beef industry.

The trade delegation consisted of a dozen young Japanese women who represent four of the largest beef purchasers in Japan.

One of the group's stops was at the Buhl ranch of former Idaho State Department of Agriculture Director Celia Gould. She hosted the trade team in her living room, with mother cows and their calves strolling by 20 feet from the main window.

"You're seeing the first part of beef production. Step 1," she told the group. "In February, calves start being born. It starts right up on this hill here," she added, pointing out of her living room window.

The trade team asked numerous questions of Gould, a third-genera-

"Bringing them here and letting them see the actual operations and industry should be a good experience and education for them. This will allow them to explain to customers the good things about the beef industry in the USA."

– Tom Kasatani, U.S. Meat Export Federation

tion Idaho cattle rancher, and many of the questions had to do with animal welfare and environmental stewardship.

"We do rotational grazing so the land rejuvenates," she said. "It's important to us that our land is healthy and our cattle are healthy. That's how we can have a quality product that we can be proud of. We have to protect our land, our water and our cattle so we can have a fourth and fifth generation and on and on."

Gould laughed when asked what her normal schedule looks like and she responded by telling the group there is no such thing and the cattle always come first.

"The cattle get fed first. That's the first job for everyone," she said, adding that "We all work together. Everybody does everything, if you're physically able. We're all family and we all work together and do everything."

The tour was hosted by the U.S. Meat Export Federation in conjunction with the Idaho Beef Council and Boise-based Agri Beef.

The tour included stops at Boise Valley Feeders, an Albertson's flagship store in Meridian, the True West Beef processing facility in Jerome and the Gould Ranch. The trade group was joined at dinner by Idaho State Department of Agriculture Director Chanel Tewalt.

Most members of the delegation don't come from a farming background so they wanted to learn everything they could about agriculture and beef production in Idaho, said Tom Kasatani of the U.S. Meat Export Federation, who accompanied the group and acted as its interpreter.

"Bringing them here and letting them see the actual operations and industry should be a good experience and education for them," he said. "This will allow them to explain to customers the good things about the beef industry in the USA."

During their outside tour of the Gould ranch, trade team members got an up-close look at mother cows casually strolling by with calves in tow.

Kasatani said it was the first time most of them experienced that type of interaction with cattle.

"As you can see, they're pretty excited," he said as enthusiastic trade team members jockeyed to have their pictures taken in front of the cows.

Former Idaho State Department of Agriculture Director Celia Gould speaks to members of a beef trade delegation from Japan April 3 at her ranch near Buhl.

Japan is the top destination for U.S. beef on a volume basis, so the visit could turn out to be a big benefit for the U.S. and Idaho beef industry.

"There's great benefit to this type of incoming trade mission because we have four of the largest beef importers from Japan here in Idaho learning about (the industry)," said Idaho Beef Council CEO T.K. Kuwahara, who joined the group during its tour. "They can really get the sense of how ranchers take care of the land and their animals to produce that high-quality beef."

She said the fact that the trade team consisted of younger people representing major beef importers was potentially a big opportunity.

"This is the future of meat buying in Japan," Kuwahara said. "So, this is really our opportunity to not only educate the younger generation, but we could secure beef purchases for the years to come."

Gould told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation after the visit she was more than happy to host the trade team in her home.

"It's important for us to let our customers know how we raise the cattle so they will have confidence in the products they are getting," she said. "We work hard to produce excellent products and for them to be able to see the work that goes into that, and the dedication of our ranchers is critical to those relationships."

She said she was also more than happy to answer the questions about animal welfare and environmental stewardship.

"We absolutely care about the animals and that's important to them and it's important to us that they know that," Gould said.

The Japanese delegation consisted of a new generation of beef buyers in Japan, said Melissa Delgadillo of Agri Beef, who helped organize the tour.

"Hosting the delegation was a wonderful opportunity to showcase Idaho's beef industry," she said. "For many of the women, it was their first time seeing first-hand every part of the beef lifecycle."

Delgadillo said opportunity for them to spend time seeing every aspect of the Idaho beef industry "was meaningful as they got to meet the hard-working people who are a part of our industry and understand what it takes to create exceptional beef." ■

DUVALL

Continued from page 2

Let's talk about the latest buzzword, "regenerative." Regenerative agriculture focuses on farm practices that promote soil health.

If you're a farmer like me, you're probably thinking, "That sounds a lot like what I already do every day."

And when we dig into modern agriculture, the practices associated with regenerative agriculture, like cover cropping, composting, and crop rotation, to name a few, are common practices.

While the term, regenerative, is growing in popularity, many people are not quite sure what it means. According to our research, there is a largely positive perception around the term, however, even if folks can't quite define it.

Soil health matters, and farmers agree. We know firsthand how important healthy soil is. It's why we plant cover crops to prevent soil erosion. It's why we rotate what crops we plant in a field to enhance nutrients in the soil. And it's why beef cattle farmers like me rotate where our livestock graze to restore the soil.

Farmers are at the forefront of regenerative practices like these because we see firsthand what it takes to grow and sustain life. We know we have a big job to do, growing the food, fiber and renewable fuel that families at home and abroad rely on.

As we innovate and adopt new tools and technology, we are also growing more with less. Farmers enjoy talking about efficiency, but unfortunately, that term gets misunderstood.

'Whether farmers are working with 100 acres or 10,000 acres, they rely on healthy soil and are committed to doing right by the land.'

It can have an impersonal tone to some. But efficiency is highly personal to farmers. We want to do our jobs better every day—caring for our land and animals—because of how much we care for our families and yours.

For farmers, efficiency and regeneration go hand-in-hand. You cannot grow more without first tending to your soil and ensuring it is healthy this season and for seasons to come.

Finally, we cannot talk about regenerative agriculture without recognizing the critical tools that help us do the important work of protecting our soil.

Modern agriculture has come a long way from the days when my grandfather carried a plow to his fields and hitched it up to his mule. Today's precision agriculture equipment is allowing farmers to monitor crop health down to the plant, use less water, and pinpoint pesticide and fertilizer application.

And yes, let's talk about pesticides. Farmers are committed to safely using these products, which often require extra training and certification. What's more, many of us live on the same land where we use these products, so we know how important safety is for our families and yours.

Without pesticides, our crop health would suffer, leading to more waste, and we would lose regenerative practices like cover cropping and no till.

Both conventional and organic agriculture have a role in the regenerative agriculture discussion.

Regenerative practices are not one-size-fits-all either. What I need to do on my farm in Georgia is going to look different from what is needed on a farm in New Hampshire or Idaho.

Farms of all sizes play a role in regenerative agriculture, too. Whether farmers are working with 100 acres or 10,000 acres, they rely on healthy soil and are committed to doing right by the land.

As new terms like regenerative agriculture rise in popularity, we need to keep stepping up and sharing our farm stories. Let's take ownership of this buzzword, rather than letting others define it for us.

To my fellow farmers, I have said it many times over—the public wants to hear from you because they trust you. Farmers and ranchers are the most trusted voices when it comes to soil health.

Our research shows that four out of five adults trust farmers and ranchers to make decisions about regenerative agriculture practices. Let's show them that their trust is grounded in the right place. ■

MILLER

Continued from page 2

being different makes them seem too exposed to potential predators.

However, a closer look reveals that cows still express their individuality while functioning within the herd. Some cows dash through working corrals, some need prodding, some prefer to lie by the feed and water, while others like to retreat to the far corner of the corral, pasture, or range.

The cows I curse the most bolt away when it's time to move, while others begin to lumber down the trail. Most of the time, cows will reach the same destination or achieve similar outcomes, but each one adds its own flavor to the process.

Aren't we humans so lucky that we never fight a group even when we agree with its goals?

2. Cows never travel in a straight line

I'm not an expert in cattle behavior and there might be a very

logical reason for this behavior, yet I have never seen a straight cow trail on the range. Every trail is a meander and a wander.

I've noticed this behavior in dairies and feedlots as cattle move through alleyways. When there is space, they don't walk in a straight line. As I mentioned, I'm not sure why this is or why it matters, but I find it interesting.

Perhaps there's a lesson for us homo sapiens. Is there some cow logic we might be overlooking? In our rush for efficiency, do we sometimes make our paths and actions too direct, causing us to ignore the subtle details of life and decision-making? Or do cows walk crooked simply because they do?

3. Environmental effects are far more critical than only human attention and effort

People can spend every waking hour with cows, and while there are far worse things a person can do with their life, fewer human activities can benefit cows more than the environment we provide for them.

A person can be with their cows every minute during calving season in a blizzard and still have less success producing healthy, happy calves than a "neglected" cow in a field giving birth on a warm, clear spring day.

Clean water, tall grass, nicely bedded free stalls, a good ration, a cool breeze on a hot day, and so on contribute to this.

'Perhaps the reason I like cows is that they challenge my approaches and my understanding. A cow doesn't change, but how I engage with them makes all the difference in my satisfaction or frustration.'

Cows are happiest and most productive when their environment suits their needs. Possibly a cow in a dark garage receiving 24-hour tender loving care could also thrive. However, my experience shows that the better the environment, the better the animal.

L. David Marquet, the retired Navy captain who authored the book, Turn the Ship Around!, said it this way: "It's not the people who need fixing, it's the conditions they're forced to operate in."

Perhaps the reason I like cows is that they challenge my approaches and my understanding. A cow doesn't change, but how I engage with them makes all the difference in my satisfaction or frustration.

A lifetime of working with both cows and people has taught me that compelling them is far less effective than when efforts are made to create the right circumstances that allow them to participate together to flourish. ■

SEARLE

Continued from page 2

production but in the production of peppermint oil, barley, food trout and alfalfa hay as well?

Idaho also ranks No. 2 in the United States in sugar beet and hop production, No. 3 in milk and cheese production, No. 4 in dry onions, spring wheat and lentils, and No. 5 in wheat, dry edible peas and wool.

Idaho farmers and ranchers produce more than 180 agricultural commodities, according to the Idaho State Department of Agriculture.

Did you know that Idaho, particularly the Treasure Valley area, is one of the main seed-producing regions of the world?

In fact, seed grown in Idaho is exported to more than 120 nations.

According to a University of Idaho report released last year, agriculture is responsible directly and indirectly for one in nine jobs in the state, 13 percent of Idaho's total gross domestic product and 17 percent of the state's total sales.

As you can see from this report, agriculture is very important to Idaho's economy. It is vitally important to many of the state's more rural communities and is in part of the way of life in many of these places.

'We are fortunate in Idaho to have many elected officials and lawmakers who are involved in agriculture and understand its importance to the state.'

Kudos to the ISDA for putting on this event each year as a way to help showcase the role that agriculture plays in our state.

It should be noted that Idaho's governor and lieutenant governor, both farmers and ranchers, visited the Ag Day event, as did legislators, many of whom are actively involved with agriculture.

We are fortunate in Idaho to have many elected officials and lawmakers who are involved in agriculture and understand its importance to the state.

Many of our surrounding states do not have this type of situation and it shows. Let us count our blessings in this regard and each do our part to help keep Idaho a great place to farm and ranch as well as raise a family.

Our founding fathers held agriculture in high regard. George Washington famously said, "Agriculture is the most healthful, most useful and most noble employment of man."

Thomas Jefferson said, "Agriculture is our wisest pursuit because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals and happiness."

If you're involved in agriculture, let these words be of encouragement. If you're not, let them serve to encourage you to help agriculture in your own way by voting for and supporting elected officials who have shown they will back our state's important agriculture industry. ■

Cattle industry is a

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

The cowboy and ranching lifestyle in Idaho is not dying off. It's just hard to see it from the road.

To be sure, there are fewer ranchers, and cowboys and cowgirls, in Idaho than in past years.

But there are still plenty of people living the ranching lifestyle in Idaho. According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, there were 7,259 livestock producers in Idaho during the 2022 census year.

There are about 2.5 million cattle in Idaho. That's more cows than people and it's not hard to see cows grazing from virtually every road in Idaho.

According to Cameron Mulrony, executive vice president of the Idaho Cattle Association, cattle is the only agricultural commodity that is statistically significant in every county in Idaho.

"Idaho's cattle industry is a big part of the state," he said. "It has a huge impact on Idaho agriculture from a financial standpoint…."

Idaho's cattle industry is very important to the state's overall economy. Idaho ranching operations brought in $2.9 billion in farm-gate revenue in 2024, according to an estimate by University of Idaho agricultural economists.

That ranks cattle and calves as the state's No. 2 agricultural commodity in terms of farm-gate revenue, which is what farmers or ranchers receive for the commodity they produce.

In Idaho, the "cattle and calves" industry ranks only behind milk, which brought in an estimated $3.8 billion in farm-gate revenue in 2024. Since milk cows also eventually enter the beef chain, Idaho's overall cattle industry is humungous and has a very large impact on the state's economy.

Idaho's cattle industry is about more than just raising cows and calves. The entire segment of the industry is well represented in Idaho.

"Idaho has all sectors of the industry and not all states have that," said Idaho Beef Council CEO T.K. Kuwahara. "We have amazing seed stock producers, cow-calf producers … stockers, feed yards, auctions, processing, and also value-added – food manufacturers. The whole gamut."

In addition to the state's more well-known ranching community, Idaho's cattle feeding industry is easily recognized as one of the top 10 in the nation, according to Mulrony.

When combined, all those sectors of Idaho's cattle industry have an impact on the state's economy that almost assuredly numbers in the tens of billions of dollars.

That said, Idaho's cattle industry does much

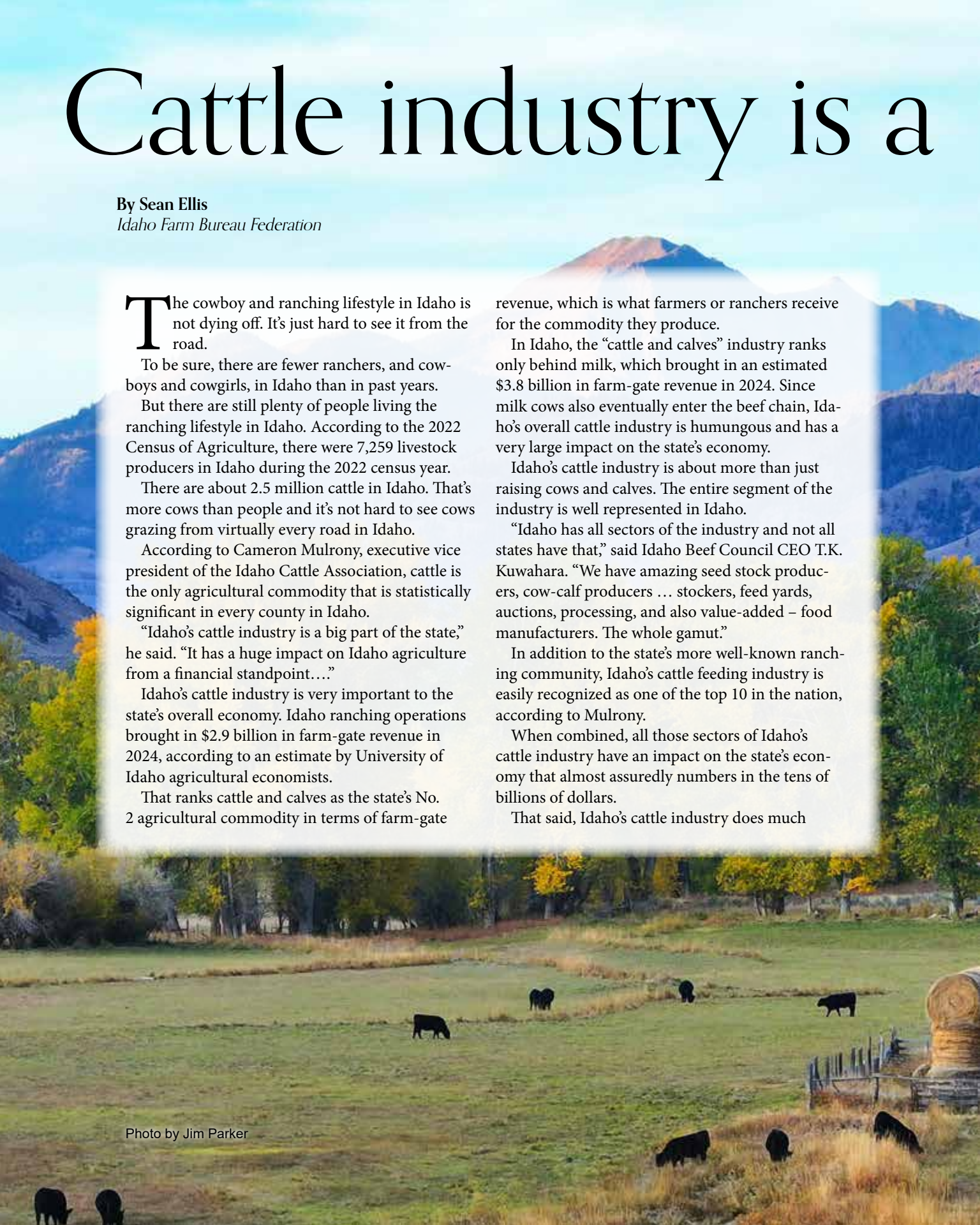
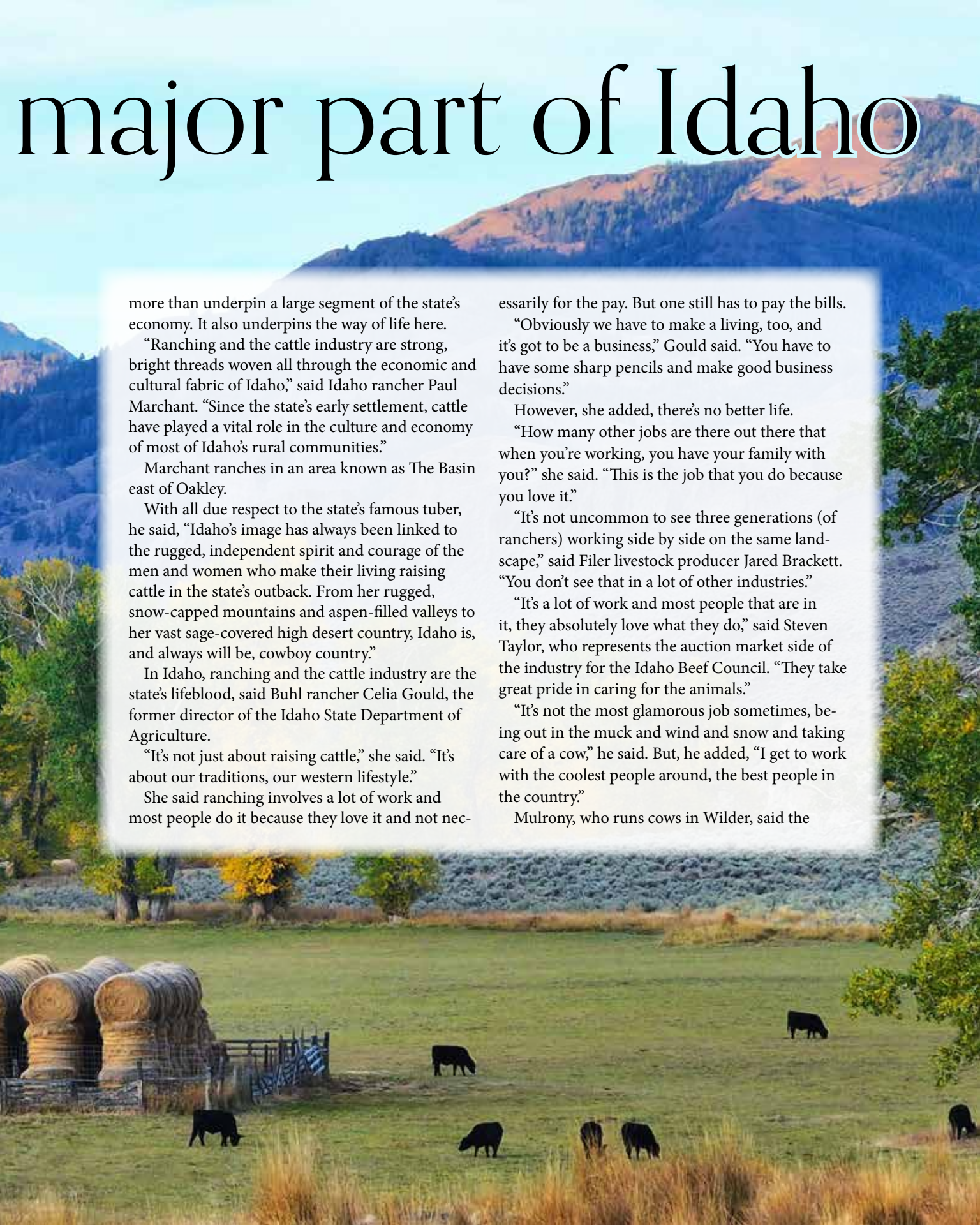


Photo by Jim Parker

major part of Idaho



more than underpin a large segment of the state's economy. It also underpins the way of life here.

"Ranching and the cattle industry are strong, bright threads woven all through the economic and cultural fabric of Idaho," said Idaho rancher Paul Marchant. "Since the state's early settlement, cattle have played a vital role in the culture and economy of most of Idaho's rural communities."

Marchant ranches in an area known as The Basin east of Oakley.

With all due respect to the state's famous tuber, he said, "Idaho's image has always been linked to the rugged, independent spirit and courage of the men and women who make their living raising cattle in the state's outback. From her rugged, snow-capped mountains and aspen-filled valleys to her vast sage-covered high desert country, Idaho is, and always will be, cowboy country."

In Idaho, ranching and the cattle industry are the state's lifeblood, said Buhl rancher Celia Gould, the former director of the Idaho State Department of Agriculture.

"It's not just about raising cattle," she said. "It's about our traditions, our western lifestyle."

She said ranching involves a lot of work and most people do it because they love it and not necessarily for the pay. But one still has to pay the bills.

"Obviously we have to make a living, too, and it's got to be a business," Gould said. "You have to have some sharp pencils and make good business decisions."

However, she added, there's no better life.

"How many other jobs are there out there that when you're working, you have your family with you?" she said. "This is the job that you do because you love it."

"It's not uncommon to see three generations (of ranchers) working side by side on the same landscape," said Filer livestock producer Jared Brackett. "You don't see that in a lot of other industries."

"It's a lot of work and most people that are in it, they absolutely love what they do," said Steven Taylor, who represents the auction market side of the industry for the Idaho Beef Council. "They take great pride in caring for the animals."

"It's not the most glamorous job sometimes, being out in the muck and wind and snow and taking care of a cow," he said. But, he added, "I get to work with the coolest people around, the best people in the country."

Mulrony, who runs cows in Wilder, said the

"With cattle, you have good land managers, people who are invested in the land. It's really a significant impact that cows provide to public lands through grazing."

– Cameron Mulrony, Idaho Cattle Association

ranching lifestyle is also a great way to raise a family and teach kids some valuable life lessons.

"I feel it really teaches kids about life," he said. "You go through the whole process on the ranch, everything from the calf to the plate, and those kids learn a lot about life. It's a great lifestyle."

Besides being a big part of the state's economy and a great way to live, ranching also provides benefits to every Idahoan in helping to manage the open spaces and beautiful scenery that have contributed to Idaho being one of the fastest-growing states in the nation.

Most of Idaho is public land, either owned by the state or federal government, and many ranchers graze their cows on that land. Public lands grazing contributes greatly to helping preserve and protect those lands, Brackett said.

"You can do a whole story on the positive effects of livestock grazing on federal, state and private grounds," he said. "Cows take low-quality forage that you and I can't digest and turn it into high-quality protein in the form of meat. That's a huge success story."

Cows not only help control invasive weeds, they can also reduce fine fuel loads through grazing, helping prevent or slow wildfires.

"If you have less material, even if it does burn, you're going to have … maybe a little slower burn and less fire

Photo by Ariane Smith

in general as far as total acres," Mulrony said. "That is a huge tool that they provide when done properly."

Because ranchers want green grass and fresh water on their grazing allotments, this also benefits wildlife year-round, he said.

"With cattle, you have good land managers, people who are invested in the land," Mulrony said. "It's really a significant impact that cows provide to public lands through grazing."

With beef prices at all-time highs, it's generally a good time to be raising cattle right now. But while prices are up, so are costs.

"Our costs have gone up significantly, just as the average consumer's prices have gone up at the grocery store when they go to buy that pound of hamburger or T-bone steak," said Brackett. "It costs us more to produce it. And not just a little bit more, but considerably more."

"Yes, it's a good time to be a cow-calf producer, but to say we're facing record booms is (not accurate)," he added. "We're doing well, but if you adjust for inflation, probably not as good as the last time prices went up high."

"The cost of everything has gone up; literally everything," said Taylor.

Right now, cattle inventories are down and beef prices are good, but that's not always the story, Gould said.

"There are a lot of years it's hard to make a living," she said. "And you're up all night with a calving heifer … there are a lot of things that can go wrong, so you have to be dedicated to this lifestyle and you have to love it."

Marchant said the ranching lifestyle is really a privilege for those involved in it.

"It's a proud and rich heritage—one of which I'm proud and humbled to be a part," Marchant said. "It's a blessing and a privilege to raise a family in ranch country." ■

Photo by Jim Parker

National Ag Day event held in Capitol building

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE – In Idaho, National Agriculture Day was more than just a celebration of farming and ranching. It was an opportunity to help educate lawmakers and regular citizens about the industry and how important it is.

Seventeen Idaho farm and ranch groups set up booths, with displays, in the state Capitol building March 18 to help celebrate the special day. The event was organized by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture.

Legislators and others visiting the Capitol building were greeted with a whole host of facts about Idaho agriculture. They had a chance to not only learn a little about the industry but talk with some of the leaders who represent farmers and ranchers in the state.

If she could have people who visited the National Ag Day event remember one thing about agriculture, it would be how large it is in Idaho, said Eliza Dugan, the state reporter for Idaho FFA.

"The scale," said Dugan, who grew up on her family's dairy farm and was one of many FFA members who attended the celebration. "It's so large. I would hope people realize how expansive Idaho agriculture is and how it affects us all."

She was glad to see many different booths representing a plethora of Idaho's agricultural commodities.

"I think it's important to understand there are many different sectors of agriculture," Dugan said. "Everything from barley to mint to cattle. There are so many different sectors of ag and it's important to recognize all of them."

Idaho's 22,000-plus farmers and ranchers produce more than 180 different agricultural commodities.

A University of Idaho report released last year found that agriculture accounts for one in every nine jobs in Idaho, 17 percent of total sales and 13 percent of the state's gross domestic product.

"The average Idahoan doesn't understand just how much food is produced here," said ISDA Director Chanel Tewalt. "I hope people walk away from this event feeling a little more connected to Idaho ag."

If people who attended the event don't know anything about agriculture, Tewalt said, "my hope if they leave here today recognizing how incredible it is. Whether it's the productivity, the volume, the true diversity of ag, I think, would astound somebody who doesn't live it every day."

Photos by Sean Ellis

During National Agriculture Day March 18, an Idaho State Department of Agriculture display included facts about Idaho agriculture.

There were plenty of people who do live agriculture every day manning booths at the event and they were eager to share a little about the sector of the industry they represent.

Samantha Parrott, executive director of the Snake River Sugarbeet Growers Association, was happy to help visitors understand a little about Idaho's sugar beet industry.

Idaho is a major producer and processor of sugar beets – about 170,000 acres of sugar beets are grown in the state annually – but not many people know that and the crop is routinely confused with red garden beets.

"It's such a big crop in Idaho but nobody knows what a sugar beet is," Parrott said. "My goal today is to help promote what a sugar beet is and that we're a massive, billion-dollar industry in the state of Idaho."

Many if not most Idahoans who have traveled down one of the state's interstates or highways has likely passed one of the large green trucks hauling sugar beets to a processing plant. But they also likely don't understand what they're really seeing, Parrott said.

Those beets will be processed into sugar that is used by people across the country on a regular basis. About 55 percent of the sugar produced in the United States comes from sugar beets and 45 percent comes from sugar cane.

"We want the public to know that even though they may not know a farmer personally, that they can still appreciate farmers. If they've eaten anything or worn clothes today, they can thank the farmer for all those ag products."

– Isabelle Leonard, Ada County Farm Bureau

"It's just such a unique crop," she said. "Not many people have heard of a sugar beet. So we're just trying to increase the base level understanding of what our crop is."

Liz Wilder, executive director of the Idaho Wool Growers Association, spent her time at the National Ag Day event educating people about Idaho's sheep industry.

"Idaho's sheep industry is a nucleus of the state of Idaho," she said. "Idaho's sheep industry is as old and historic as the state itself."

Besides producing food and wool, from the norther tip of Idaho's Panhandle all the way to its southern corners, sheep are an essential tool in helping to manage public lands, Wilder said.

"The sheep and wool industry plays a crucial role in wildfire mitigation by reducing fire fuel loads," she said. "The industry is really important in terms of environmental stewardship and sustainability."

A booth set up by Ada County Farm Bureau allowed people to write thank you notes to farmers if they chose to.

The booth was representing all of Idaho's county Farm Bureau organizations and the thank you cards will be distributed to farmers around the state, said ACFB member Isabelle Leonard, who manned it.

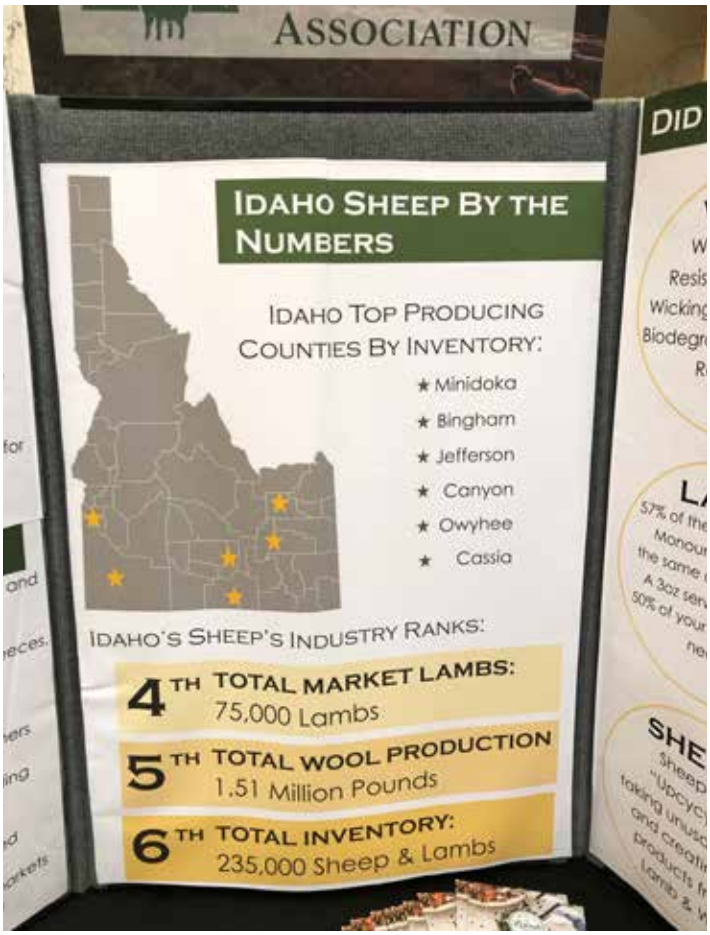
"We want the public to know that even though they may not know a farmer personally, that they can still appreciate farmers," she said. "If they've eaten anything or worn clothes today, they can thank the farmer for all those ag products."

The National Ag Day event took place during Idaho's legislative session and was attended by many legislators, as well as the governor and lieutenant governor, who are both ranchers and farmers.

"I think it's super important to have an event like this during the session," said Rep. Shawn Dygert, R-Melba, a recently retired high school agriculture education teacher and FFA advisor.

"Obviously there are people in the legislature that don't have any idea what agriculture does for the state of Idaho," he said. "So for them to understand how big a part of our economy it is, as well as our culture and our way of life, is really important."

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins released this statement in recognition of National Ag Day: "Today on National Agriculture Day, we recognize the people who make it all possible. The farmers, the ranchers, and the producers who dedicate their lives to feeding, to fueling, and to clothing our nation."



TOP: **During National Agriculture Day March 18, Ada County Farm Bureau member Isabelle Leonard mans a booth that allowed the public to write thank you notes to farmers. Those thank you cards will be sent to farmers across the state.** ABOVE: **Visitors to the National Ag Day event had the opportunity to learn a little about many Idaho commodities, including the state's sheep industry.**

"So today, let's just not celebrate agriculture, let's celebrate the people behind it," Rollins added "To every farmer, to every rancher, and to every producer, we see you, we appreciate you, and we thank you. Happy National Agriculture Day!" ■

Photo by Jacob Christensen

Six stalwarts of Idaho agriculture were inducted into the Eastern Idaho Agriculture Hall of Fame March 21 during a banquet in Fort Hall.

Six inducted into E. Idaho Ag Hall of Fame

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

FORT HALL – Six stalwarts of Idaho agriculture were inducted into the Eastern Idaho Agriculture Hall of Fame March 21 during a banquet in Fort Hall.

This year's inductees are Rick Phillips of Pocatello, Scott Brown of Soda Springs, Richard Larsen of Dubois, Marc Beitia of American Falls and Mark and Stephanie Mickelsen of Idaho Falls.

The EIAHF recognizes people who have made significant contributions to the industry over the years.

During the ceremony, Lt. Gov. Scott Bedke, a rancher from Oakley, encouraged farmers and ranchers to continue to speak up on behalf of the industry and remain engaged on issues important to agriculture.

"Agriculture only works because we work hard, we adapt to challenges and we lead by example," he said.

Bedke pointed out that 25 percent of the U.S. population were farmers in 1939, but that number is less than 2 percent today.

That means, he said, if you took a trip to Disneyland in 1939, one of every four cars you waved at was a fellow farmer.

"Today, you would have to pass 50 cars before you could wave at a fellow farmer," Bedke said. "It's paramount that we stay vocal and we stay involved…."

The EIAHF was formed in 1972 to honor men and women who have made extraordinary contributions to agriculture and Eastern Idaho.

About this year's inductees:

Mark and Stephanie Mickelsen

The Mickelsens produce potatoes, seed potatoes, canola and wheat on their Idaho Falls farm. According to their hall of fame bio, their commitment to excellence has driven them to explore and acquire land with optimal soil for potato farming, taking them to locations such as Wapello, Arco and Ashton.

According to the bio, the Mickelsens' farm has been an industry leader in the use of compost to improve soil health, and they are also constantly working to improve their irrigation systems to help with energy and water savings; they have been able to reduce water use by 30 percent in some cases.

"Farmers neighboring Mark and Stephanie speak highly of their work ethic, their honesty and their ability to quickly and efficiently get crops planted and harvested," their hall of fame bio states.

"Mark and Stephanie have dedicated their lives to improving farming practices, while also advocating the advancement of agriculture in Idaho and across the nation," the bio states.

Mark has served as president of Bonneville County Farm Bureau and on the American Farm Bureau Federation water committee and is currently president of the Butte Market Canal Co. Stephanie is serving her second term in the Idaho Legislature and has served on the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation board of directors.

"They are notable examples to the agriculture community of Eastern Idaho and are truly deserving of this induction into the Hall of Fame," the bio states.

Scott Brown

Brown, a fourth-generation farmer, farms about 11,500 acres in Caribou County. The dryland operation, which is at an average elevation of 6,000 feet, grows barley, wheat and occasionally mustard.

The mission statement for his farm says "we will strive to make the opportunity to farm available to further generations and … if we take care of the land and the farming operation, it will take care of us."

According to his hall of fame bio, Brown has an extensive record of industry leadership and advocacy experience representing the grain industry on local, state, national and international levels.

In addition to serving on the Idaho Barley Commission and Idaho Grain Producers Association, Brown has served on the National Barley Association, National Association of Wheat Growers, and was involved with the U.S. Grains Council.

"Besides being a well-respected farmer, Scott has an extensive track record in industry advocacy, representing the interests of Idaho farmers on local, state and national levels," his hall of fame bio states.

Richard J. Larsen

What began as a partnership with his brother, Blaine, in the hay industry, has evolved for Larsen into an international hay, potato and grain business. He currently farms over 5,000 acres, including organic and conventional products.

He has developed hay markets both nationally and internationally, reaching clients as far away as Asia.

According to his hall of fame bio, when presented with the challenge of transporting hay from Idaho to clients thousands of miles away, Larsen "instinctively thought of ways to put as much hay in a shipping container as physically possible."

This led he and his brother to be among the first in the nation to develop and implement a hay pressing machine.

"Richard has always been progressive in his farming practices, which have helped him be a grower of organic and natural crops such as potatoes, alfalfa and barley," his hall of fame bio states.

Marc Beitia

Beitia has been involved with agriculture throughout his life. He and his father started Beitia's Suffolk Sheep in 1969 when the family moved to Pocatello from their ranch in Nevada.

He attended University of Idaho where, according to his hall of fame bio, he worked on every farm within the university's campus. He was also an FFA and 4-H

"We can't forget that all seasoned farmers and ranchers started out as young ranchers and farmers."

– Shane Bolgen, EIAHF board member

county fair judge throughout Idaho and eastern Oregon and Washington for nearly 20 years.

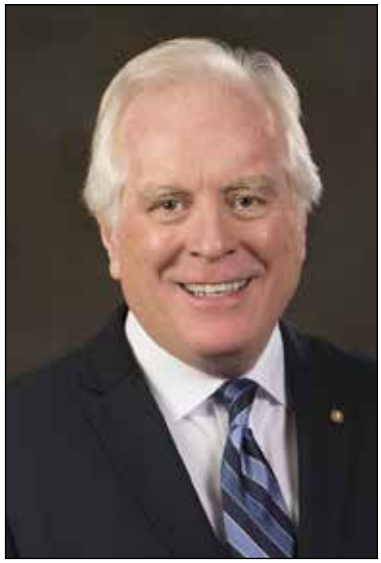
He began his teaching career in 1984 as an agricultural educator at Raft River High School in Malta. He later started the ag education program at American Falls High School, where his FFA programs have been recognized three times as a National Model of Excellence by the National FFA Association.

According to his bio, the AFHS FFA program is the only chapter west of the Mississippi to be recognized three times as a National Model of Excellence.

The American Falls FFA chapter has grown from an average of 120 members to an average of 320 members, which is 70 percent of the school's student body. Beitia has taught more than 5,300 students during his 41-year teaching career.

Rick G. Phillips

From his early days on the family farm in Dayton, Phillips has spent his career working with, or promoting, agriculture in Idaho.



Phillips grew up on the family dairy farm in Dayton and later worked in ag finance. He later worked at the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, where he organized the Idaho Agriculture in the Classroom initiative.

He also helped develop the ag department's first international trade mission to Taiwan and he hand-carried 40 pounds of Idaho onions to introduce at Asia's largest food show in Tokyo.

Recently retired from the J.R. Simplot Co., where he worked since 1990, Phillips has helped promote multifaceted agriculture programs in food production, ranching, nutrients and technology in Eastern Idaho and internationally.

While at Simplot, he partnered with Farm Bureau to establish the Southeast Idaho Farmers Market, which is now the Portneuf Valley Farmers Market.

Ed Duren Memorial Award

Also honored with the Edward P. Duren Memorial Young Producer Award during this year's EIAHF event were Blake Skidmore of Terreton, Trey Orme of Ashton and Abby Rowe of American Falls.

The Edward P. Duren Memorial Young Producer Award recognizes innovative agriculture producers under the age of 40.

This award "is tip of the hat to those young producers in Eastern Idaho who we see are doing amazing things," said EIAHF board member Shane Bolgen. "We can't forget that all seasoned farmers and ranchers started out as young ranchers and farmers."

About this year's Ed Duren award recipients:

Trey Orme

Orme grew up the Orme family farm east of Ashton side by side with his dad raising wheat, barley, alfalfa and beef cattle.

He purchased his first farm ground, 320 acres, in 2015, where he continues to raise wheat and barley.

Abby Rowe

As a fifth-generation Idaho potato farmer, Rowe's farming roots run deep. She grew up on the original homestead of her ancestors that dates back to the Carey Act of 1908.

After graduation from university, she was able to bring her agronomy and management skills home to the family farm where she manages 800 acres of potatoes.

Blake Skidmore

Skidmore grew up helping on the family farm in all aspects of swathing, raking, baling and combining wheat.

He has also been involved in digging potatoes and running the cellar crew and was a key figure in the turning of 200 acres of flood-irrigated ground into a ditch feed linear.

Call and report depredations

By Dexton Lake
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

There have been several good changes to state law to help producers manage conflicts with apex predators. However, these measures and their success depend on producer engagement.

If you find dead or injured livestock and suspect a grizzly bear, black bear, wolf, or mountain lion is responsible, call Wildlife Services immediately for an investigation.

Wildlife Services responds quickly, but you should take steps to preserve the body and any evidence of depredation. This may include:

- Covering the carcass to protect it from the elements
- Taking photos or videos of the body, tracks, and surrounding area
- Gathering eyewitness accounts
- Documenting the Wildlife Services investigation with photos or videos

After the investigation, Wildlife Services will issue a report classifying the depredation as confirmed, probable, possible, or unknown. You must then submit this report to the Idaho Office of Species Conservation to request reimbursement.

Confirmed, probable, and possible cases are eligible for payment, but confirmed cases receive priority, followed by probable and then possible. Payments are issued at the end of the calendar year and may be prorated based on available funds.

If you believe your case was misclassified or key evidence was overlooked, you can appeal to the Depredating Wildlife Appeals Board, where you can present additional evidence for reconsideration.

This board includes representatives from the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and a large animal veterinarian. Meetings are closed to the public and typically held virtually, meaning you may or may not need to appear in person.

To submit an appeal, contact the Office of Species Conservation.

While the process may seem complex, producer participation is essential. In addition to providing reimbursement, confirmed depredations serve as a key metric for predator management decisions in different game units.

Calling to report depredations helps control predator populations.

Funding sources

In 2024, the Idaho Legislature established a state-managed fund to assist producers impacted by grizzly bear and wolf depredation. The fund includes $150,000 for depredation reimbursement and $75,000 for prevention efforts.

This state fund supplements fluctuating federal aid for wolf depredation. Unlike federal funding, which only covers confirmed cases, state funds cover confirmed, probable, and possible rulings.

If a grizzly bear caused the depredation, producers may seek compensation through state funding or the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP). LIP reimburses only 75% of market value, so it is recommended to apply for state funds first while they are available.

Compensation for black bear and mountain lion depredation comes from Idaho Fish and Game's dedicated funds, which are supported by revenue sources such as hunting tag sales.

If you suspect wolves caused an unusual number of missing livestock, you may be eligible for reimbursement based on loss percentages. Contact the Idaho State Department of Agriculture to submit a claim.

It is important to note that for grizzly bears, wolves, black bears, and mountain lions, you cannot double dip into funding sources.

If you have more questions about prevention, please see the Grizzly Bear Toolkit found on the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation website. While the toolkit specifically discusses grizzly bears, the principles are the same for all predatorial wildlife.

If you have questions about the process or funding, please contact Dexton Lake in IFBF's Boise office at (208) 333-7086. ■

Contact information

APHIS-Wildlife Services
(208) 373-1630

Idaho State Department of Agriculture
(208) 332-8500

Idaho Department of Fish and Game
(208) 334-3700

Office of Species Conservation
(208) 334-2189

Photo by Sean Ellis

Dry beans are harvested in a Magic Valley field in 2024. Idaho has set a record for total value of agricultural exports for four straight years.

Four straight years of farm export records for Idaho

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – Idaho has set a record for total value of agricultural exports for four straight years.

Considering that much of the farm products produced in Idaho are exported to other nations, that's a good sign for the state's ag industry.

A total of $1.34 billion worth of farm products from Idaho were exported to other nations in 2024, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. That eclipses, by 14 percent, the previous record of $1.18 billion set in 2023.

Idaho also set records for ag export value in 2022 ($1.13 billion) and 2021 ($1.02 billion).

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. ag exports in 2024 increased 1 percent compared with 2023.

Dairy was the state's top agricultural export in 2024 at $282 million, which was an 11 percent increase over 2023.

"This increase was consistent with overall dairy price changes, with the value of … milk prices higher by more than 11% in 2024 versus the prior year," said Doug Robison, the Idaho president for AgWest Farm Credit. "Volume gains were likely modest with most of the increase coming from stronger pricing."

According to the Census Bureau data, which was crunched and provided by Idaho State Department of Agriculture, $200 million worth of Idaho farm products under the "prepared vegetables" category were exported in 2024, a 29 percent increase over 2023.

"Food processing capacity within the state has been increasing and this was reflected in the strong year-over-year gains of 28.8% in the (prepared) category," Robison said.

Idaho exported $156 million worth of products in the "edible vegetable" category, up 30 percent from 2023.

The prepared and edible vegetable categories are both heavy on potatoes, Idaho's top crop.

Live animal exports continued to soar, reaching $133 million in 2024, up 40 percent from $95 million in 2023.

"Live animals were the single strongest category with more than a 40% increase, supported by ongoing strength in the cattle market," Robison said.

Idaho sold $129 million worth of farm products in the "oilseeds, etc." category, a 6 percent increase over 2023. This category includes miscellaneous grain, seed and fruit.

According to the Census Bureau data, Canada remained the top destination for Idaho ag exports, as farm product exports to that nation in 2024 totaled $421 million, a 10 percent increase over 2023.

Idaho ag export value to Mexico increased 6 percent, to $260 million, and Gem State ag export value to South Korea was up 42 percent, to $74 million.

Idaho ag export value to Japan increases slightly, to $70 million, and it rose 32 percent to the Netherlands, going from $47 million in 2023 to $62 million in 2024.

A separate set of data released annually by USDA in the fall shows Idaho set ag export value records in 2020, 2021 and 2022.

The Census Bureau data is based on what state a commodity is exported from, so it doesn't capture all of Idaho farm product exports. For example, it wouldn't capture the wheat from Idaho that is exported out of Portland.

The USDA data, which shows Idaho sold $2.89 billion worth of ag products in 2022, captures more of the state's farm exports but is not as timely as the Census Bureau data, which is released monthly.

However, both sets of data track closely when it comes to percentage increases and decreases.

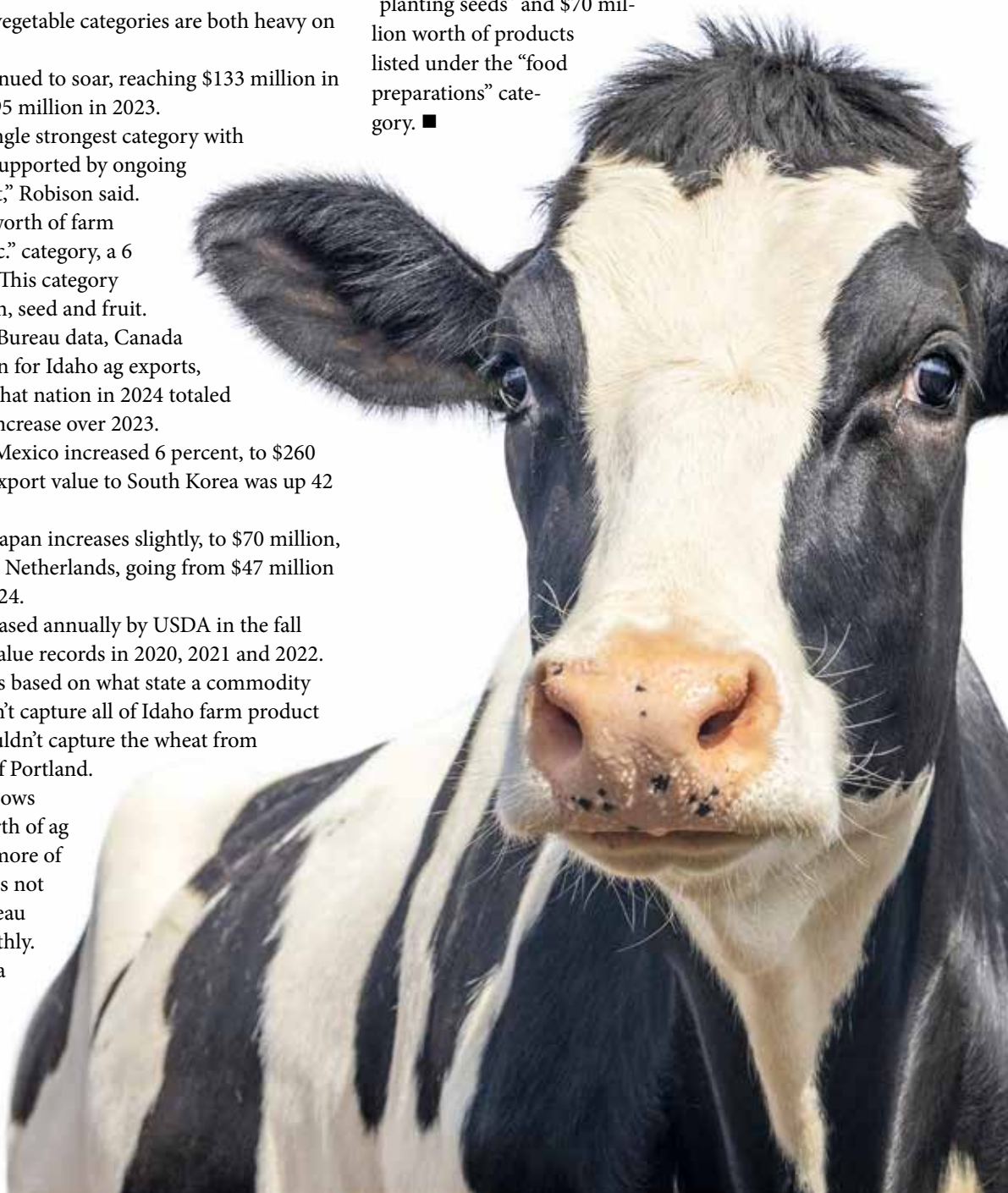
The USDA data for 2023 was due to be released in November but still hasn't been released yet. However, USDA has released data for fiscal year 2024 that shows top ag exports by state.

The federal fiscal year begins Oct. 1 and runs through Sept. 30 of the following year.

That USDA data shows Idaho exported $382 million worth of dairy products to the world in fiscal 2024 (Oct. 1, 2023 – Sept. 30, 2024).

It also shows that $258 million worth of "processed vegetables" were exported from Idaho in fiscal 2024.

The USDA data shows $142 million worth of live animals were exported from Idaho in fiscal 2024, as well as $74 million worth of "planting seeds" and $70 million worth of products listed under the "food preparations" category. ■



RIGHT: **Dairy was Idaho's top agricultural export in 2024.** Stock photo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The 1910 fires

By Chris Schnepf
University of Idaho

This year will be the 115th anniversary of an event that dramatically affected North Idaho forests and forestry across the United States – the 1910 Fire.

Also known as "The Big Burn," the 1910 Fire burned over 3 million acres in North Idaho, western Montana, eastern Washington and southeast British Columbia over two days on a weekend in August 1910.

The fire killed 87 people and destroyed numerous manmade structures and several entire towns. It was one of the largest fires (though not the deadliest) in U.S. history.

There are some great resources available to learn more about the 1910 fires. "The Big Burn" by Timothy Egan is one outstanding book. Stephen Pyne also wrote an excellent book on the 1910 fires titled "Year of the Fires: The Story of the Great Fires of 1910."

Finally, the PBS series "American Experience" did a 1910 fires episode titled "The Big Burn" (available at https://www.pbs.org/video/american-experience-big-burn).

There have been many infamous forest fires in U.S. history, such as the Peshtigo Fire in 1871 in Wisconsin. These fires certainly affected those areas dramatically, but the extent and the timing of the 1910 fires had a large, long-lasting effect on U.S. forest policy.

Gifford Pinchot was struggling to build the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) at the time. The 1910 fires galvanized support for an agency that among other things, would prevent similar levels of forest fires.

Could we have another 1910 Fire? We are primed for fire on many western U.S. forest sites. The 1910 fires re-defined how we thought about and fought forest fires for nearly a century.

Prior to 1910, there was some openness to letting light surface fires burn through forest understories – a legacy of how Native Americans worked with fire and how recent settlers experienced those fires, primarily on drier forest types.

After 1910, the USFS adopted a goal of having every forest fire out by 10 a.m. the next morning – an approach that was absorbed by most other western states and fire-fighting entities.

As we kept putting out fires with ever-more sophisticated technologies (moving from shovels to parachuted firefighters to retardant drops from jet airplanes), we kept growing forest fuels.

Drier forest types now burn hotter and more destructively than they typically did historically. Legal difficulties in doing active management on federal lands have contributed to the fuel issues.

LEFT: **Many fires in moist forests burn through tree crowns in some places and drop to the surface in others.** Photo by Chris Schnepf

'Forest fuel reduction is not a one-time treatment. Fuels grow back, and periodic mechanical treatment of understory fuels across extensive acreages could be very expensive.'

University of Idaho photo

The 1910 fires burned extensively in Idaho and adjoining states. Image from University of Idaho Library Digital Collections.

Longer fire seasons owing to climate change are further exacerbating fire potential.

Part of the solution to reducing Idaho forest fire risks is treating understory fuels, reducing stocking, and favoring the most drought-adapted, fire resistive species, such as pines and larch.

Some of this can be accomplished with thoughtful prescribed thinning and in some cases regeneration cuts to re-establish more fire-adapted species.

But forest fuel reduction is not a one-time treatment. Fuels grow back, and periodic mechanical treatment of understory fuels across extensive acreages could be very expensive.

That is the biggest part of why you might be hearing more about "prescribed wildfire" on public lands.

The idea with this term is that on drier forest types, where the norm historically was frequent (e.g., every 5-20 years) surface fires more than crown fires, it may be possible on some sites to use naturally ignited surface fires to help manage fuels, if we have sufficiently reduced stand density through thoughtful thinning, reduced understory fuels, are meeting certain environmental conditions when fires come through, and there is little risk to homes in the area.

In these cases, such fires could both reduce crown fires and reduce fuel treatment costs.

These and other types of prescribed fire could reduce the damaging effects of forest fires and the expense of fighting forest fires and fuel reduction.

Note that I specified drier forest types, where Douglas-fir and the occasional grand fir are the most shade tolerant species that can be found in the understory.

People without in-depth training in forest ecology sometimes generalize frequent surface fire regimes to all forest types. That is a mistake.

Prescribed wildfire could be more problematic on moist and cold forests. Moist forest types had less frequent surface fires (say every 30-50 years) and crown fires on a scale of every 150-300 years.

Many fire events on moist Idaho forests would have been a mosaic of surface and crown fire. Within that mosaic, there were often large patches of 100 acres or more where crown fires killed all trees (patch sizes ranging from 20 to hundreds of acres).

High-elevation cold forest types were more typically crown fires or nothing on the scale of every 70-100 years.

To learn more about reducing fire risk on your forest property, we have an extension publication titled "Reducing Fire Risk on your Property" PNW 618, available at https://www.uidaho.edu/extension/publications/publication-detail?id=pnw0618 .

After the recent southern California fires, many insurance companies are taking a closer look at the homes they insure in the rural West. In some cases, homes in rural forested areas are being dropped from their home insurance policies.

There is also a lot of discussion of homes meeting certain risk reduction criteria (e.g., reducing fuels next to homes) to keep home insurance policies.

To learn more about techniques to reduce your home's risk of burning down in a fire, check out "Protecting and Landscaping Homes in the Wildland/Urban Interface" (SB0067) downloadable at https://www.uidaho.edu/extension/publications/publication-detail?id=sb0067.

Fire has always been and will continue to be a big part of U.S. forests, especially in the West. Preparing our forests and homes for fire will reduce the chances of catastrophic fires, like those we had in 1910, of happening again in Idaho. ■


"Ever since I can remember, this was my dream."
Living the dream means sharing the road.
Our decisions on the road affect Idaho's independent farmers. Read Miguel's story and learn how you can support Idaho's independent farms by driving engaged—phone down, eyes up—during your commute. Thanks for sharing the road, Idaho.
shift-idaho.org
SHIFT

Sharing the road with Idaho farmers

By Marisa Jackels
For the Idaho Transportation Department

It's 5:00 a.m. and Miguel Villafana is awake. Hot coffee in hand, he looks over the potato and sugar beet fields he farms and breathes in the sweet, earthy air.

In this pre-dawn moment, the world is quiet but for his breathing.

A couple hours from now, he'll eat pancakes around the table with his wife, Camas, and their three young children (soon to be four!). Perhaps later, his eldest daughter, Dalia, will join him for a tractor drive—one of the seven-year-old's favorite activities.

In this moment, though, it's quiet. The scent of soil, the open stretch of sky over the farmland, the tasks ahead of surveying, checking irrigation, and planning for the day with his employees—all of it is as familiar to him as the seasons.

"This is what I saw every single day growing up in Aberdeen and farming with my Dad," he said. "And I loved it. Ever since I can remember, this was my dream."

Miguel chased this dream through college, where he studied agribusiness at Utah State University and then became an ag lender. Along the way, he met and married Camas, a "city girl" from Boise.

"I want you to know," he said, only a week after meeting her, "my dream is to be a potato farmer."

"Well, I know nothing about farming," she replied. "But I like country music. And I've always wanted to live in the country."

When he found out they were expecting their first child, he knew it was time to buy a farm.

"I want our kids to experience everything I did," he said. "I'm not going to force them into farming, but I want them to have that same upbringing I did—because I loved it."

They purchased their first piece of farmland: 20 acres in Wilder. The following year, they expanded to 100 acres. Nearly eight years later, Villafana Farms now encompasses 525 acres of potatoes, sugar beets, and grain forage crops.

"I never gave up on the dream," Miguel said. "As tough as it seemed and at one point, almost impossible, I just kept with it."

Living the dream means sharing the road

While Miguel has long loved the art of farming, one aspect is particularly stressful—moving massive farm equipment along rural roads and highways.

As convenient as it would be for farming equipment never to leave the field, the reality is that many farms are spread across multiple locations, requiring farmers to use highways and rural roads alongside everyday traffic.

"Every time we get on the road, we hope everything goes fine. But it's very stressful," Miguel said.

When they need to transport equipment, Miguel takes every precaution. He plans the route and time so they are least likely to encounter traffic. He checks that lights are working, reflectors are clean, tires are aired, and hydraulics aren't leaking.

If the implement hangs into other lanes, he flags the edges and, if possible, has a pilot car out front to warn drivers.

Many of these steps are legal requirements for Idaho farmers. On an episode of Idaho Farm Bureau Federation's Dirt Road

LEFT: **Farming equipment typically moves between 14 and 30 mph. If you're going 70 mph and slam on the brakes, it will take you approximately 5 seconds to stop..** Submitted photos

Wilder farmer Miguel Villafana wants to share the message that farm equipment and regular vehicles can share the road.

Discussions podcast, Corporal Cory Juber, an Idaho State Police trooper, shared the regulations and recommendations:

- Anything wider than the lane (over 8.5 feet) must have a flag on it
- Flags must be a minimum of 18x18 inches square
- Flags need to be hooked on the far left projection of the implement
- Pilot cars are not legally necessary but help alert other drivers to slow-moving farm equipment
- If more than three cars are stacked behind you, try to pull aside and let them pass as soon as it's safe for your equipment and where the other vehicles have visibility.

Juber emphasized that the most important thing for farmers is marking the equipment to increase visibility, especially any edges that protrude into oncoming traffic.

"Those edges can be really hard to see until you're right on top of them," he said.

Yet, even the flags, caution lights, and reflectors aren't enough if a driver is distracted. One day, during planting season, Miguel and his team were driving a cultivator down the highway. The implement was as far off the road as possible, with flags and caution lights on.

"If people can understand that the need to transport equipment allows us to put food on the table, I think it would help a lot."

– Miguel Villafana

Nevertheless, a driver coming the opposite way failed to see it and smashed into the implement at 60 mph.

"I thought the driver died," Miguel said. It was a terrifying moment for him and his crew.

Thankfully, the man survived. But they found he was unlicensed and uninsured, leaving Miguel with the cost of repairing the implement and a significant spike in insurance. Financial blows like these can be devastating for family farms.

"We're depending on the profitability of our operation not just to feed our own family but to continue producing—keep food stocked in grocery stores nationally and even globally," Miguel said. "If people can understand that the need to transport equipment allows us to put food on the table, I think it would help a lot."

Leading causes behind farming equipment-related crashes

Data shows a concerning uptick in farming equipment-related crashes in recent years.

Between 2019 and 2023, there were 278 crashes involving farming equipment in Idaho, eight of which were fatal, and 18 with serious injuries. These numbers from the Idaho Transportation Department show a spike in incidents between 2020 and 2022, when Idaho saw a dramatic increase in population.

Jesse Barrus, an ITD district engineer in southcentral Idaho, pays close attention to how farming equipment and commuters interact on the road. He maintains 2,321 lane miles, which includes the fertile farmlands of the Snake River plain.

It's not uncommon to see 18-wheeler trucks hauling dairy, potatoes, sugar beets, or corn on the highway. In fact, it's his team that cleans spilled potatoes off the highway when a truck overturns.

Over nearly a decade in the field, Barrus has noticed a few contributing factors to farming equipment-related crashes.

Yes, he's noticed Idaho roads have grown busier as the population has increased. He's also noticed that the size of farming implements has grown, making it harder for drivers to move around them.

But far and away, he said, the most common contributing factor is unsafe driving behavior. Namely, driving distracted and thus failing to slow down in time, and being impatient and making rash decisions.

Distracted driving

One major problem, Barrus said, is that drivers don't realize the "differential speed" between their fast-moving vehicle and slow-moving farming equipment.

"If that differential is big enough, the potential of a crash increases," Barrus said. "You exacerbate that by being distracted."

Distance closes faster than you think. If you look down for five seconds while

Farm equipment and other vehicles can coexist on Idaho's roadways by learning to work together.

traveling 55 mph, you've gone the length of a football field.

Farming equipment typically moves between 14 and 30 mph, depending on size and weight. If you're going 70 mph and slam on the brakes, it will take you approximately 5 seconds to stop.

If you're distracted and don't notice the farm equipment, you might not have that kind of time. This is when crashes occur, such as a driver running into the back of a potato truck or colliding with a tractor pulling into the road.

"If I'm on a tractor on the highway, I'm just crossing my fingers," Miguel said. "Because if a car is going 70 miles per hour and the driver is not paying attention, they won't have enough time to stop."

Impatience

Barrus and Corporal Juber have also observed a lack of patience as a contributing cause.

Drivers are eager to get around the slow-moving equipment and will try to pass in no-pass zones, which is both illegal and dangerous.

"I've seen, personally, the majority of crashes happen when people get impatient and make rash decisions that aren't the best. It ends up in a catastrophic collision," Juber said.

Tips for sharing the road

Let's get practical—how are commuters and farmers supposed to share the road? Here are our top six tips:

Farmers:

1. Do everything you can to be visible. Flag your implements, especially any edges that protrude outside of your lane. Use a pilot car when possible. Ensure your equipment is always lit up and visible and has proper reflectors.
2. Be predictable and over-communicate.

As a commuter, Barrus notes that it's sometimes hard to tell when a tractor is turning right or left. If hazards are on, you can't see the turn signal. Sometimes, operators make hand signs. Whatever your method, communicate what you are doing as clearly as possible.

Commuters:

Drive engaged and sloooowww down. Driving engaged means eyes up and phone down. Stay attentive. Barrus warns against the "false sense of security" on rural roads, which can lead drivers to relax and get distracted. This is when the worst crashes happen; 75% of fatal crashes occur on rural roads.

"On rural roads, drivers go into an autopilot," he said. "Really, what we need is for people to be on high alert."

"The overall footprint of agriculture creates so many jobs for Idahoans and has such a big impact nationally and globally. It's incredibly important to protect the agriculture here. It's incredibly important that we share the road with farm equipment."

– Miguel Villafana

Driving engaged gives you plenty of time to slow down for farming equipment on the road. And when you see those big machines, give them space.

These machines are no joke. They're crucial for any farming operation and often cost up to half a million dollars. Plus, they're massive. One of Miguel's implements is a 12-row planter that is 22 feet wide and weighs 6,100 pounds. That's as heavy as a small elephant and as wide as half a basketball court.

Machines this size also come with lots of blind spots. A good rule of thumb is to leave 50 feet of space between you and the farming equipment in front of you. This way, they are more likely to see you, and you'll have more time to react or see when it's safe to pass.

Be patient

We get it. Everyone's trying to get somewhere, and it's frustrating when farm machinery, or anything for that matter, slows you down. But transportation officials agree: patience is key.

Remember that everyone is trying to do their job and get where they want to go. Rather than make a risky pass, find the patience to wait until it's safe.

"Just because they [farming equipment] are slow doesn't give you permission to make dangerous maneuvers or pass in a no-pass zone," Corporal Juber said. "Be patient. There will be a time where you can safely pass."

Following a tractor for a few miles may feel like it's taking forever, but the delay is often minimal. For instance, following a tractor for two miles at 20 mph takes about six minutes, about the same as waiting for two stoplights.

Farmers will look for areas to pull over safely and let traffic pass. In the meantime, it's best to follow at a safe distance and practice patience. Aggressive driving and risky maneuvers are simply not worth the risk.

Give yourself extra travel time during planting and harvest season.

Because we live in an agricultural state, we can encounter farm equipment on the road throughout the year. However, the likelihood increases during the major planting and harvest seasons of early spring/late spring (planting) and fall (harvest).

When traveling near agricultural areas, being prepared to slow down is crucial. Farm access roads are in use, and farming equipment might pull onto the highway from unexpected access points.

It's wise to factor in these delays and leave the house earlier during planting and harvest seasons.

In doing so, you're supporting farmers during their busiest time of year. Like Ott Clark, a farmer and co-host of Dirt Road Discussions, said, "Give that guy an extra five minutes. He's working hard that day."

Thank you for supporting Idaho farmers

Agriculture is part of Idaho's lifeblood. It impacts our state. A 2024 study by the University of Idaho found that agribusiness is directly and indirectly responsible for 13 percent of Idaho's total gross state product, 17 percent of its total economic output, and one in every nine jobs.

And it impacts our planet. Every year, billions of dollars worth of ag production are grown and shipped from Idaho farms to around the world—from potatoes to peppermint oil. The Treasure Valley is one of the world's biggest seed production areas.

The truth is, we need Idaho farmers. The world needs Idaho farmers. Their hard work keeps grocery shelves stocked and food on the table.

"The overall footprint of agriculture creates so many jobs for Idahoans and has such a big impact nationally and globally," Miguel said. "It's incredibly important to protect the agriculture here. It's incredibly important that we share the road with farm equipment."

As Idaho continues to grow, so do the challenges with farming operations. The solution, Miguel says, is learning to work together.

"We have a robust agricultural economy and we can coexist. Tractors and implements, sharing the road with commuters," he said.

Perhaps working together starts with the old idiom, "Walk a mile in their shoes." Or, in this case, "Drive a mile in their tractor."

The next time you're slow-moving behind farm equipment on your morning commute, remember Miguel—awake and working since 5 a.m. to feed families across Idaho and the country.

Five minutes of patience on the road can make all the difference—not just for safety, but for the future of Idaho agriculture. ■

Idaho, U.S. potato acres forecast to decline

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – Idaho potato acres are projected to decrease by 15,000 acres this year compared with last year.

That would be a 5 percent drop if realized, from 315,000 acres in 2024 to 300,000 in 2025.

Total U.S. potato acres are forecast to fall by 4 percent, dropping from 930,000 acres in 2024 to 891,000 acres in 2025.

Those projections were made in the April 10 edition of the North American Potato Market News.

According to NAPMN, "the largest acreage reductions are expected in Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and Maine."

According to potato market news, all three of the major frozen potato processors made significant contract volume cuts for the 2025 crop.

Those reductions ranged from 5-15 percent and some growers were zeroed out completely. Hydrators have also reduced contracts, by 30 percent or more.

"Raw-product supplies are plentiful," the NAPMN report states. It also says surplus spuds have been diverted to feedlots and "demand for early-harvested new crop potatoes is down."

AgWest Farm Credit's April 9 Market Update also expects steep acre cutbacks for potatoes.

"Potato growers are grappling with widespread challenges as processors implement substantial cuts to contracted acres," the AgWest report states, noting that reductions across the Northwest "average around 10 percent, with some producers facing cuts as steep as 40 percent or greater."

According to AgWest, potato contract prices are down by an average of 5 percent compared to last year.

"While some growers are looking for alternative uses for their unallocated land, options remain limited," the AgWest report states.

NAPMN and AgWest both say that the reduction in contract acres could lead to an increase in open-market potatoes this year.

This could be a wild card this year when it comes to how many acres of potatoes growers actually end up planting.

"In addition to contract reductions, poor alternative crop prices could encourage growers to plant more open-market potatoes than normal," NAPMN states. "Poor alternative crop prices might encourage growers to take the risk (of planting uncontracted potatoes), hoping that processors will need extra potatoes late in the processing season, or that they will be able to sell them in the table potato market."

"The reduction in contract acres could lead to an increase in open market potatoes in 2025," the AgWest market update states.

If the North American Potato Market News projection is correct, it would be the smallest U.S. potato acreage since 1952.

Photo by Sean Ellis

Idaho and U.S. potato acres are forecast to be down significantly in 2025 but growers are still expected to produce plenty of America's favorite vegetable this year.

However, if average trendline yields are achieved, U.S. farmers would produce about 410 million hundredweight of spuds in 2025, which would exceed the size of the 2022 crop.

Idaho growers planted 330,000 acres of potatoes in 2023 and 295,000 in 2022. U.S. spud acreage was 966,000 in 2023 and 923,000 in 2022.

Idaho leads the nation in potato production and Gem State farmers typically produce about a third of the nation's potato supply, or about 13-14 billion pounds.

While potato acreage is down due to a supply-demand imbalance, the good news is that farmers will still produce plenty of America's favorite vegetable this year.

Potatoes USA tracks U.S. vegetable purchases each year.

"Potatoes are America's favorite vegetable," Potatoes USA Chief Marketing Officer Kim Breshears told Idaho farmers in November at the state's annual Potato Harvest Meeting. "Consumers love our product." ■

Agritourism flourishing in Idaho

By Kayla Myers
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE — Idaho's farming and ranching landscapes are welcoming more visitors than ever, as agritourism continues to grow and the state now ranks No. 5 in the nation when it comes to total revenue per agritourism operation.

In 2022, agritourism generated $16.9 million in total revenue in Idaho from 200 operations. That equates to $85,545 per operation, according to the 2022 Census of Agriculture.

Erica White, the Idaho Preferred program manager at the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA), defined agritourism and offered insight into what agritourism looks like across the state.

"According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, agritourism includes any activity that brings visitors to a working farm, ranch or agricultural business for recreational, educational or entertainment purposes," she said.

White said visitors in Idaho experience agriculture firsthand through activities such as U-pick farms, vineyard tours, dude ranches, pumpkin patches, lavender farms, seasonal festivals, harvest and processing workshops, educational demonstrations and more, fostering appreciation for Idaho's farming heritage and encouraging local sourcing.

For some, like Idaho Sen. Mark Harris of Soda Springs, agritourism is part of a family legacy.

"We own a one-piece ranch, which is unique these days," he said, "It was started in 1948 when my family purchased the land. Starting in 1992 mom ran the guest ranch, we re-did the bunk house and hosted about 6-8 people a week from the 1st of June through the end of October. It took off like wildfire."

Jim Lowe, owner of Lowe Family Farmstead in Kuna, grew up in agriculture in Montana and found agritourism offered an unexpected opportunity to stay connected to the industry.

"I didn't think I would have the opportunity of owning my own farm but I did work in agriculture growing up," he said. "Agritourism was intriguing because it was a niche market. It was an idea in its infancy and grew from there."

He also highlighted the industry's need for adaptability and innovation.

"One thing about agritourism is the nature of the industry is finding reactive ways to create connections; that's the success," he said.

Photos courtesy of Lowe Family Farmstead

"Agritourism is a key driver in promoting Idaho's agricultural industry by connecting consumers directly with farmers, ranchers, and food producers."

– Erica White, Idaho Preferred

Lowe said agritourism continually evolves through creative efforts that forge meaningful connections.

He played a key role in advancing this vision by helping to get Idaho's first agritourism statute passed in 2013.

This legislation is aimed at providing greater protections for agritourism operators and encouraging the growth of agriculture-based experiences across the state.

Agritourism has also created educational opportunities for people unfamiliar with agricultural life.

"The biggest benefit was the education, how ranchers handle their animals and take care of them," said Harris.

Harris said the biggest benefit of his agritourism experience was educating the public about how ranchers handle and take care of their animals.

He said visitors would help out with feeding livestock and participated in daily ranch operations. With grazing permits on two forest allotments, the ranch offered a unique look into the life of a rancher and the dynamic of working with federal agencies, an aspect of agriculture that the public is rarely exposed to.

White emphasized that agritourism is more than a trend. It's a growing force in Idaho's economy and culture.

"Agritourism is a key driver in promoting Idaho's agricultural industry by connecting consumers directly with farmers, ranchers, and food producers," she said. "It enhances public awareness of food production, strengthens rural economies, and provides an additional revenue stream for farm and ranch operations, helping them diversify beyond traditional production."

In 2013, the Idaho Legislature passed the Idaho Agritourism Promotion Act, which offered farmers and ranchers more protection to run their operations smoothly.

"The Agritourism Promotion Act … has played a significant role in shaping the growth and regulation of agritourism businesses in Idaho," said White. "By providing liability protections for agritourism operators, the legislation has reduced legal risks for farmers, ranchers, and food producers who open their operations to the public. This protection has encouraged more producers to diversify their businesses by offering agritourism experiences such as farm tours, U-pick orchards, ranch stays and on-farm events." ■

Classifieds

FARMING/EQUIPMENT

Allis-Chalmers WD45, Serial #WD124095, starts and runs, tires hold air. $1,000, OBO. Located in Nampa, Call or text Terry (208) 866-2510

Hesston 560 round Baler low low hours. CM continuous grain dryer 10 hp. Single-phase propane heat. Two 1000 gal NH3 full nurse tanks.Wilrich 13 bottom mold board plow. 1973 Timpe hopper trailer. Cat model 12 motor grader. 208-251-0457 Inkom, Idaho

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White gated pipe- 12 pieces of 8 inch by 30 ft. asking $24 each or all for $250. Also, a 9 pieces of 8 inch by 35 ft. aluminum gated pipe. Asking $50 each or all for $400. Located in Caldwell, ID. 208-989-8897.

Due to husband passing selling Hydraulic Miller off set Disk, 12Ft, good condition. I have pictures can send. $6,000.00 Cell 208-741-1626. Paula

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Massey Ferguson Compact Tractor with Yanmar mower attachment. GC2300 Sub Compact 4 WD diesel utility tractor. 2005 low hours (929 Hrs) Always been garaged with service records in top condition. Located Middleton Idaho. Call 503-348-1498 $8500

FOR SALE

Metal Chicken nests. 3 sections with 10 nests boxes in each. Gooding area. $10.00 each section cash only. 208-308-1537.

Irrigation business for sale. Comes with 2006 Chevy truck, miller air pak welder, wire feed and Tig. Pipe press, 50 hp irrigation pump. Salmon, ID 208-768-7396

WANTED

Maintain & improve hay ground & grazing land- 6,000 acres. Oversee hay operations, run equipment & assist w/ shop maintenance. College degree in agronomy is a plus. Full time, housing, benefits, retirement plan & 401k. Contact Robert Finck 307-323-9020 robert.finck@silviesvalleyranch.com

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

Paying cash for unwanted fireworks, the older the better. I collect firecrackers, Roman candles, mortars and anything else aerial. I also buy old m-80s like fish and game used to hand out. Great way to repurpose old fireworks as they are disassembled and used to create new ones. 208-866-2112

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.

SERVICES

Attn: Farmers. Have a rock chuck problem? Retired and responsible, I put safety first. With 1,400 chucks shot in 2024 I'm deadly accurate. References available. Call or text Rick Weidner, 986-888-7051. Donations are welcome.

Free Classified ads for Idaho Farm Bureau Members

Send to knlindauer@idahofb.org

FREE CLASSIFIEDS

Non-commercial classified ads are free to Idaho Farm Bureau members. Must include membership number for free ad. Forty (40) words maximum. Non-member cost is 50 cents per word. You may advertise your own crops, livestock, used machinery, household items, vehicles, etc. Ads will not be accepted by phone, Ads run one time only and must be re-submitted in each subsequent issue. We reserve the right to refuse to run any ad. Please type or print clearly. Proofread your ad. Ads must be received by May 19 for the June Producer.

Mail ad copy to:
FARM BUREAU PRODUCER
P.O. Box 4848, Pocatello, ID 83205-4848
or email Kristy at knlindauer@idahofb.org

IDAHO FOUNDATION FFA

94th Annual Idaho FFA State Convention

Over 1,800 Idaho FFA members gathered in April in Twin Falls for the 94th Annual Idaho FFA State Convention. In addition to showcasing their skills in Career and Leadership Development Events (CDEs and LDEs), members participated in the official business of the organization during convention. Chapter delegates voted on key issues and a new State Officer team was selected, shaping the future of Idaho FFA through thoughtful leadership and collaboration.

We're proud to recognize the chapters and students who earned top honors in their events.

Congratulations to 70 FFA members who received $83,000 in Idaho FFA Foundation scholarships!

Congratulations to the newly elected 2025-2026 Idaho FFA State Officer Team!

Matthew Waite, President (Melba)
Elizabeth Mueller, Vice President (Salmon)
Emily Sorensen, Secretary (Preston)
Gabriel Kitamura, Treasurer (Meridian)
Anna Hernandez, Reporter (American Falls)
Alison Misenheimer, Sentinel (Meridian)

Officers pictured right to left, in the order listed above.

Agricultural Education
Murphy Clouss, Kuna FFA

Agricultural Issues
American Falls FFA

Agricultural Sales
Madison FFA

Conduct of Chapter Meetings
Kuna FFA

Creed Speaking
Hadlee Brown, Homedale FFA

Employment Skills
Carter Moore, Sugar-Salem FFA

Extemporaneous Speaking
Londyn Higgins, Meridian FFA

Farm Business Management
Rigby FFA

Floriculture
Middleton FFA

Horse Evaluation
Minico FFA

Parliamentary Procedure
Troy FFA

Poultry Evaluation
Preston FFA

Prepared Public Speaking
Jacee Fuller, Filer FFA

Spanish Creed Speaking
Marcos Peralta, Jerome FFA

State Star in Agriscience
Lilliana Villavicencio, Hansen FFA

State Star in Agribusiness
Brayden Hammer, Rigby FFA

State Star in Agricultural Placement
Jacy Wagstaff, American Falls FFA

State Star Farmer
Kayda Hickman, Rigby FFA

To support students traveling to the National FFA Convention, visit GrowIdahoFFA.org

Idaho Farm Bureau
P.O. Box 4848
Pocatello, ID 83205-4848

Episode 81 - Dances With Wolves & Grizzlies

Brody Harshbarger agrees that there is a place for apex predators like grizzlies and wolves, but from his experiences working with cattle and with Fish and Game, he shares that there is a growing need for common-sense management.

He shares how public perception has often been detoured away from science and actual apex predator recovery numbers, influenced by emotion and marketing that isn't always accurate. The trickle-down effect of some apex predator policies has affected places like his hometown.