

LICENSE PLATE is...



The Idaho shag dog, 10

Spud Daddy, 14

Bean food
page, 20



Public lands grazing supports America's beef supply

America's public lands are woven into the fabric of the West. They're places where families hunt, fish, hike and make memories together.

They also tell the story of generations of ranchers who have worked the land, raising high-quality American beef while helping care for the open spaces so many people enjoy.

Public lands serve many purposes, but one that often fades in the background is the role they play in our food supply. Public lands are an essential part of American ranching. With

America's cattle herd at its smallest size in 75 years, reliable access to those grazing resources is critical to rebuilding the herd.

That's why Farm Bureau recently submitted comments supporting the Bureau of Land Management's proposed updates to federal grazing regulations. The proposal modernizes decades-old regulations, provides more flexibility for today's grazing practices and takes a more practical approach to managing the public lands that benefit all Americans.

See **DUVALL**, page 6

The President's Desk

By Matt Dorsey

President, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



Farm Bureau is making a difference

Since becoming president of Idaho Farm Bureau Federation, I have had the opportunity and privilege to travel all around the state and meet with hundreds of Farm Bureau state presidents and members.

I have also traveled to Washington, D.C., where I have met with American Farm Bureau Federation staff, and I have met all the other state Farm Bureau presidents.

This has given me the opportunity to witness first-hand and in a very personal way how the

Farm Bureau organization represents its members, at the local, state and national level.

Let me provide a few examples.

At the national level, AFBF ensures that members of Congress and the executive branch know what issues are important to farmers and ranchers. Our national Farm Bureau organization makes sure our nation's elected officials know and understand the various challenges and opportunities facing U.S. farmers and ranchers.

See **DORSEY**, page 7

Inside Farm Bureau

By Zak Miller

CEO, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



Defensible space

In a state like Idaho, defensible space is always on our minds—and in the middle of a hot, dry summer, it moves to the front. We have all seen the results, good and bad.

There are the remarkable images of homes licked by flame but not devoured, and the heartbreaking ones where the space between a home and the fuel around it simply was not enough.

Defensible space is always the answer, but it is never the same answer. What counts as adequate depends entirely on where you are, so each of us

has to understand our own situation and build the protection that fits it.

A few things about defensible space are certain—not just for fire protection, but for life in general.

- It must be prepared in advance. Vegetation control, green space, and fire breaks cannot be created minutes before a fire arrives. That work has to be ongoing, done long before any threat emerges.

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Idahoans embrace retro black and white plate

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – Idaho Potato Commission officials suspected Idaho's new retro-style black and white license plates would be popular, but they were still surprised by just how popular the plates actually are.

Since they became available last summer, Idahoans have been selecting 100-150 of the 1950s-style plates every day "and it hasn't really slowed down," said Sam Eaton, the IPC's vice president of legal and government affairs.

"The plates have exceeded our expectations," he added. "They have been very, very popular. Based on the popularity of retro-style black plates in other states, we were hopeful they would be popular, but we didn't think we'd be at the level we are at in one year."

Eaton helped the IPC get the plate approved by legislators.

According to the Idaho Transportation Department, the plates, which have the words World Famous Potatoes at the bottom, are currently the most popular specialty license plate in Idaho. As of July 9, there were 60,362 active registrations of the black and white plate.

That put it ahead of the Idaho North America specialty plate, which had 51,688 active registrations. The Elk Wildlife plate was next, with 51,451 registrations, followed by the Famous Potato Teal and White plate (39,470), the Wildlife Blue-bird plate (34,450) and the Wildlife Trout plate (28,948).

Other popular specialty license plates in Idaho



LEFT: Artist's rendering of the new black and white plate.
Courtesy photo

include the Veterans plate (21,906), Disability plate (16,718), Capitol Commission (15,471), Snow skier (8,943), Statehood Centennial (8,401), Pet Friendly (7,661), Timber (7,397), Don't Tread on Me (7,299) and Sawtooth National Recreation Area (6,945).

At the other end of the spectrum, for obvious reasons there is only one active registration of the Congressional Medal of Honor plate, there were two registrations of the Legislative plate, four of the Former POW plate, six of the College of Eastern Idaho and 11 of the Armed Forces reserve plate.

When it comes to universities, Boise State University had 5,094 registrations,



Submitted photo

Idaho's black and white license plate from 1953.

University of Idaho 4,507 and Idaho State University 529.

The legislature last year approved the vintage black and white plate by an overwhelming combined vote of 99-1.

Rep. Doug Pickett, the Republican rancher and spud farmer from Oakley who carried the bill in the House, last year told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation he believed the black and white plate would be very popular. His prediction proved right.

"There was terrific demand for the black plate," he said. "It was pervasive. Everywhere, everyone wanted these black plates."

The license plates have the word "Idaho" on the top and "World Famous Potatoes" along the bottom. The plates are all black with white lettering.

Motorists also have the option to purchase the same type of retro plates that are all white with teal lettering.

Idaho legislators have tried to put the brakes on new, specialty license plates but these ones technically aren't really new. They're just retro, or throwback plates.

"It's not even a new plate; we're just kind of re-imagining that (old) plate," Eaton said.

"We just brought back that retro-looking black plate from the '50s that people like. It's that sleeker, simpler look."

Jamey Higham, CEO of the Idaho

potato commission, believes it's a point of pride for most Idahoans to have potatoes on their license plates.

"I think everybody probably has a little different idea about it, but I think that Idaho has fully embraced being famous for potatoes," he said. "I think it's a point of pride for a lot of people."

In addition to regular registration fees, people who want one of the new, old plates will pay \$70 for them, with \$25 going to the IPC and \$45 to the state highway account.

The renewal fee for the plates will be \$50, with \$15 going to the commission, which is funded by the state's potato industry and receives no taxpayer funds.

Eaton said although the plates do help the commission promote Idaho's most iconic product, he suspects a lot of people don't realize that by purchasing the plates, they are helping the commission promote Idaho potatoes.

"I think probably a lot of people don't realize that," he said. "I think that was a secondary benefit for a lot of people."

"It's been a great success for the potato commission and it's been great for the state," he said about the plate's popularity. "We're very happy and pleased with the people of Idaho embracing that plate. We hope it continues." ■

Continued from page 2

America's ranchers have endured years of drought, rising costs and economic uncertainty. Many have been forced to reduce their herds simply to survive. While cattle prices have reached record highs, those prices reflect both a limited supply of beef and strong consumer demand.

Rebuilding herds across the country will take time. Raising cattle is a long-term investment, and it takes about two years before expanding a herd begins to increase the nation's beef supply.

Every decision ranchers make today has long-term consequences for tomorrow's food supply. Access to public lands grazing helps ranchers make those long-term investments while keeping family ranches economically viable and strengthening rural communities.

Public lands grazing benefits ranchers and the land

For generations, ranchers have responsibly grazed livestock on public lands while caring for the landscapes we all value. The administration's proposed updates recognize what ranchers have long understood—land health is influenced by many factors beyond livestock grazing, including recreation, wildfire, invasive species, drought and wild horses.

By evaluating land health across all uses and relying on science-based assessments, ranchers and other caretakers of the land

'Every decision ranchers make today has long-term consequences for tomorrow's food supply.'

can make better decisions that benefit both the landscape and the people who depend on it.

The proposal also provides greater flexibility to respond to changing conditions on the ground, supports succession planning for beginning ranchers, recognizes targeted grazing as an important land management tool, and improves the appeals process so ranchers have more certainty while decisions are being reviewed.

These changes give ranchers the flexibility and certainty they need to continue their work of responsibly grazing livestock while supporting healthy rangelands.

At a time when America's cattle herd remains historically small, practical, science-based grazing policies will help keep family ranches on the land, strengthen our domestic beef supply, and reinforce the food security Americans depend on every day. ■

MILLER

Continued from page 2

- It is site specific. A rancher in Elmore County faces very different conditions than a homeowner in Kootenai County. There is no single design; it must be built for the landscape and conditions where you live.
- It is both an individual responsibility and a social need. When you protect your own property, few will do it for you—but your effort also strengthens the whole community, whether a subdivision or a neighboring ranch. Neighbor after neighbor, the work compounds into a safety no single person could ever create alone.
- I am no expert on fire, but I have heard that the greatest thing a property owner can do is create real defensible space. If

'Do we support those working toward a better water future, or criticize before we understand the difference between investment and waste?'

that is true—and I believe it is—what else in life can it teach us? I am no financial planner or life coach, but I can connect this idea to Idaho agriculture.

- Prepare in advance—build your markets. Idaho grows too much food, too well, not to sell beyond our borders. Commodity commissions and checkoffs exist to build those customers before we need them. Are the producers they serve checking in, understanding their purpose and their work?
- Protect what is shared—defend our water. Idaho is largely desert and water is far too precious and complex for any one person or industry to manage alone. It takes national, state, local, and private planning. Do we support those working toward a better water future, or criticize

before we understand the difference between investment and waste?

- Stand on your own—then stand together. Idahoans are independent-minded, and I love it. We admire grit and the belief that the first step is the one you take yourself. Just as with your own property, few will defend it for you—but

once you start, others often help. When equipment cannot move down a road, or a farmer cannot find parts or suppliers, the whole community suffers. Are we supporting ourselves first, then stepping up to lead, or at least to back the leaders around us?

Defensible space helps mitigate fire, and

the same discipline can protect agriculture across our great state. It is one of our finest tools, but only if it is created and maintained proactively—and the same is true of our agriculture industry and our rural culture.

An individual is powerful. A community protects into the future. ■

DORSEY

Continued from page 2

Take organic agriculture for example. Yes, it's true that certified organic producers don't use the same chemicals and pesticides that conventional farmers do. But that doesn't mean conventional farming is wrong or that organic farming is somehow better.

Organic and conventional farming both serve important roles and it's important that our elected officials understand that, especially as certain activist groups try to use the issue to divide our industry.

AFBF also ensures elected officials, as well as federal agencies such as USDA, know where farmers and ranchers stand on important issues such as immigration reform, the farm bill and the Waters of the United States (WOTUS) issue.

I am also happy to report that our AFBF president, Zippy Duvall, loves nothing more than meeting and mingling with Farm Bureau members at the county level.

I can assure you Zippy would much rather meet with Farm Bureau members than enjoy a round of golf or lounge by the pool side.

When he is not meeting with Farm Bureau members, our AFBF president is working tirelessly on your behalf representing your issues to our nation's leaders.

At the state level, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation makes sure our members' stances on a wide variety of issues – wolves, water, pesticide use, trespassing, etc. – are made crystal clear to legislators, the governor's office and state agencies.

IFBF also fights for common-sense legislation that benefits agricultural producers and opposes legislation that would do the opposite.

The recently passed Agricultural Protection Areas legislation, which provides certain benefits and protections to farmers and ranchers who voluntarily put their land in an APA, was an idea that was thought of and hashed out by IFBF members.

This state law would not exist if IFBF members didn't create this idea and push for its passage into state law.

At the county level, so many farmers and ranchers do so much for their local communities that it would be impossible to list all the examples in this magazine.

Here's one example. Did you know that the Idaho FFA

Foundation's raffle program – see story on page 12 – was created by former Canyon County Farm Bureau President Sid Freeman.

This is just one example of a Farm Bureau member who has made a difference.

Many Farm Bureau members volunteer to serve on numerous boards of irrigation districts, school boards, etc. They are making a difference not only in the agricultural industry, but in their local communities as well.

To everyone, at every level, who is working hard to benefit agriculture and their own communities, thank you. Thank you for your time and effort, and thank you for what you do to make Farm Bureau, agriculture, and this country a better place. ■

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Museum photo 'Harry the Cow Dog' embodies Idaho Shags' treasured traits, captures spirit of the American West

By Dianna Troyer

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

There's nothing quite like an Idaho Shag, the increasingly popular hard-working cow dog with distinctive wiry hair standing up in random directions. Their often rascally gaze makes them look like they played with an electric fence and have no regrets.

"Once people get one, they tend to stick with the breed," said Susie Morton, an Idaho Shag breeder since the early 1990s and resident of the Lost River Valley in central Idaho. "They're faithful, tough and fearless. If they do get kicked, they get up and go right back at it."

For decades, Morton has relied on them while working for livestock associations, managing ranches, and helping friends.

An Idaho original thanks to innovative ranchers decades ago, Idaho Shags are renowned for their stamina, loyalty, playfulness, and gentleness with children. The disheveled-looking dogs are generally a cross of Airedale terrier, border collie and Australian shepherd with some breeders adding heeler and Kelpie.

Ranchers created the crossbreed because they needed a medium-sized stock dog with herding instinct and a hair coat to protect them from the cold.

Idaho Shags have a special legacy in the Lost River Valley. Harry, the breed's unofficial ambassador, became a national celebrity for his infamous photo bomb near the Mackay Reservoir.

A scruffy black-and-white dynamo, Harry's enthusiasm is enshrined in a muse-



Photo by Dianna Troyer

Lost River Valley rancher Bret Zollinger recalls the backstory of how the iconic photo "Harry the Cow Dog" was made, describing it as a fortuitous accident for fine art photographer David Stoecklein, his longtime friend. Harry and cowboy Mike Seal jump a ditch in perfect unison.

um-quality photo entitled "Harry the Cow Dog." David R. Stoecklein, a nationally renowned western fine art photographer, unintentionally filmed him and a cowboy astride his horse leaping a ditch in perfect unison.

The endearing photo of Harry impressed curators at the Autry Museum of the American West in Los Angeles. Although it was taken in the late 1990s, Harry's obvious exuberance for life gives it an enduring quality, noted curators who bought it in

“It’s cool, plumb cool for that photo to be in a national museum. It was purely accidental.”

– Bret Zollinger

2016 for the Cowboy Gallery due to “its significance in capturing the spirit of the American West.”

“That photo always makes me smile,” Morton said. “It’s what shags are all about – how they’re happy, playful, get excited and become a little wild. They have a lot of personality.”

Photo’s backstory and Harry’s fate

Morton’s friend, rancher Bret Zollinger, who was grateful for one of her puppies, was helping Stoecklein during that photo session and recalls its backstory.

“It’s cool, plumb cool for that photo to be in a national museum,” said Zollinger, Stoecklein’s neighbor and the fourth generation in his family to raise cattle in the valley. “It was purely accidental.”

Mike Seal, the cowboy in the once-in-a-lifetime photo and Bret’s longtime friend, agrees.

“That photo was a fluke that made Dave famous,” said Seal, a former manager of the nearby 6X Ranch. “Dave tried to re-create it but never could.”

Seal, a Realtor in Salmon, said the photo offers timeless advice. “Harry reminds us to be a free spirit and not follow in someone else’s footsteps, to get in the mix of life on your own terms.”

Zollinger, Seal and their decades-old friend Jay Hoggan, who owned Harry, recall their roles in the unforgettable milli-second photo session.

“We were over at Dave’s place that day,” Zollinger said. “He crawled backwards into a culvert so he could be at ground level when Mike jumped over the ditch.”

Harry kept getting in photos, recalls Hoggan, a rodeo stock contractor at the time who often provided horses for photo sessions.

“Dave got impatient with Harry,” Hoggan said. “He finally had enough and shouted, ‘Put that damn dog up.’ In hindsight, Dave was glad Harry didn’t stay away. He was using his camera’s motor

drive and later said he just remembered seeing a blur but didn’t realize he had photographed Harry until he developed the film.”

Harry was always a hero to the Hoggan family.

“Some friends couldn’t have a dog anymore, so they gave him to us,” Hoggan said. “We named him Harry because he was, well, just so hairy. He worked hard at whatever we asked of him.”

Unfortunately, Harry’s fate is unknown. While returning home from a rodeo in Washington, the Hoggans stopped in Mountain Home to fuel up.

“He must have jumped off the truck to go find a bush or take a quick run,” Hoggan said. “We drove on, assuming he was back there like usual but soon realized he was gone. We went back to the gas station and looked for hours but never did find him. We like to think he charmed a family and started a new chapter of his life.”

A crisis responder

Another charming Idaho Shag is versatile Muppet, a 4-year-old registered crisis response canine who comforts trauma victims in Mesa, Arizona.

“I want Idaho ranchers to know what an incredible, versatile, intelligent breed of dog they developed,” said his owner, Jenn Potter. “Muppet is scent-trained, knows hand signals, and learned to climb a ladder.”

In January 2024, the duo registered with Crisis Response Canine, a national nonprofit that certifies K9 teams to comfort those dealing with

an accident, violence, or tragedy.

Potter collaborates with police, fire departments, medical professionals, community organizations, schools and counselors and arrives at scenes with Muppet, a soothing presence.

“We’ve gone on calls with first responders,” she said. “Muppet helps victims feel safe and protected. He’s gentle with children, too, especially nonverbal autistic kids. They become excited when they learn to communicate with Muppet through hand signals, asking him to sit, give a hug, or roll over.”

Potter has had Muppet since he was 4 weeks old.

“I had fostered an Idaho Shag and was impressed,” Potter says. “When a girlfriend told me of a shag puppy available on a ranch in the area, I went and picked one.”

Potter recently launched a website, the-mightymuppet.org.

This summer, Morton looks forward to her shags Carl, Rhonda and Blacky having litters. “I never have trouble finding good homes for my pups. Most buyers are in Idaho, but I’ve sold some as far as Massachusetts and Arizona.” ■



Jenn Potter’s Idaho Shag, Muppet, is a certified crisis response canine. She collaborates with police and fire departments, arriving at traumatic scenes with Muppet, a soothing presence. Photo by Jenn Potter



Photos by Sean Ellis

Amaya Aguirre-Landa, executive director of the Idaho Grain Producers Association, draws winners of the 2026 Idaho FFA Foundation raffle. To her right are FFA members. Kneeling and spinning the barrel is Sid Freeman, the Middleton farmer who, with his wife Pam, started the raffle in 2010 as a way to provide scholarship money for FFA members.

FFA raffle program helps promote ag education

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

MERIDIAN – When Middleton farmer Sid Freeman started a tractor raffle in 2010, he saw it as a way to get rid of an old tractor and help raise a little scholarship money for Idaho FFA members.

Sixteen years later, the raffle is still going strong and raising a lot of scholarship money for agriculture’s future employees and leaders.

According to Idaho FFA Foundation officials, the raffle program has raised more than half a million dollars toward scholarships and for helping fund the state’s 100-plus FFA chapters.

There are currently more than 6,000 FFA members in Idaho.

“I wanted to help ag ed students in high school go on to college and then hopefully they’ll come back to our communities as leaders in the future,” Freeman said during this year’s 16th annual raffle event.

Freeman started the raffle program with his wife, Pam, in 2010. With the help of local ag-related businesses, the Freemans refurbished a 1941 Farmall tractor and hauled it around the state on a borrowed trailer to promote it.

The first drawing was held in April 2011 and the grand prize during the early years of the raffle was a refurbished tractor.

In 2020, the Idaho FFA Foundation started offering an off-road utility vehicle as the grand prize as a way to appeal to a wider

“We’ve awarded so many scholarships and been able to benefit so many local chapters and help them in their efforts in running really good agricultural education programming in their areas.”

– Carly Jordan, executive director, Idaho FFA Foundation

potential audience of ticket buyers. The grand prize is still hauled to more than 25 events across Idaho.

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

Freeman said one of the unintended results of the raffle program is that it has become a visual symbol of the Idaho FFA program. The grand prize is hauled to events around the state, helping educate people about the importance of FFA and agricultural education.

“The unforeseen advantage that we got from the raffle was the publicity,” he said. “It really has highlighted agricultural education and the FFA program. It’s definitely a traveling billboard.”

He said his main goal was and is to help FFA students go on to post-secondary education and hopefully return to the ag industry in their local communities as well-equipped workers and leaders.

He said the FFA program has a proven record of turning out good employees and leaders, whether it’s in agriculture or any other industry.

“These students, once they get through college and move on to other avenues of their life, you see them in all industries and achieving many high-level accomplishments,” Freeman said.

More than 5,800 raffle tickets were sold this year, raising more than \$116,000. Half of each \$20 raffle ticket will go toward funding scholarships for FFA members heading to post-secondary education and half will go directly back to the FFA chapter that sold the ticket.

Carly Jordan, executive director of the Idaho FFA Foundation, said the raffle program has been a huge benefit to the state’s FFA members.

“It’s a very important program for the Idaho FFA,” she said. “We’ve awarded so many scholarships and been able to benefit so many local chapters and help them in their efforts in running really good agricultural education programming in their areas.”

During this year’s raffle drawing, Jordan also spoke about how the FFA program benefits students, as well as the state.

“FFA members grow into innovators, collaborators and leaders for the Idaho agriculture industry and across the state,” she said. “The scholarship raffle program has gained the Idaho FFA Foundation a ton of public visibility.”

She also thanked the ag industry for supporting the raffle pro-



This is the grand prize for this year’s Idaho FFA Foundation raffle.

gram, as can be seen by the dozens of names of sponsors on the back of the trailer that hauls the grand prize to various events.

“We’re very thankful to have a lot of very generous sponsors for this program,” Jordan said.

Amaya Aguirre-Landa, executive director of the Idaho Grain Producers Association, drew the names of this year’s raffle winners. The drawing was witnessed by Idaho FFA Foundation officials, several FFA members and Idaho Farm Bureau Federation staff.

The winners were announced July 7.

The winner of this year’s grand prize, a new Polaris RZR XP-4 1000, is Tammy Ray of New Plymouth.

The second-place winner, of a chainsaw courtesy of Campbell Tractor Co., is David Phillips of Blackfoot.

Beth Pawlak of Kuna won the third-place prize, a \$500 D&B Supply gift card courtesy of D&B Supply.

Fourth-place winner Lupe Rivera of Gooding won a \$300 Valley Wide Country Store gift card courtesy of Valley Wide Cooperative.

Sponsorships for the 2026-2027 raffle close Aug. 14. Tickets are available starting July 17. Learn more at <https://www.growidahoffa.org/scholarship-affle/> or by contacting the Idaho FFA Foundation. ■



Spud Daddy restaurant based on the Idaho potato

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE – A fast-casual restaurant called Spud Daddy that is based on the famous Idaho baked potato has opened in downtown Boise.

During a soft opening June 19, a constant waiting line stretched out onto the sidewalk. Nearly a thousand meals were served before 2 p.m., said owner Thomas Watson.

The restaurant has remained open since then and a hard grand opening was held July 10 on National French Fry Day.

“We thought it was a cool idea to do a Chipotle-like concept centered around potatoes,” Watson said.

He said the restaurant quadrupled its expectations during the soft opening.

According to Watson, Spud Daddy serves “the biggest, baddest Idaho Russet potatoes around.”

In preparing the concept behind the restaurant, Thomas looked through old ad campaigns for Idaho potatoes from the early 1900s that showed great big baked potatoes.

“We looked through that and thought, Yeah, we need to get massive baked potatoes,” he said. “We need people to look at the potatoes and think, Holy cow!”

Based on opening day, that happened. “We had a line out the door for hours and hours,” Watson said.

He said the opening day turnout gave

The waiting line during opening day at Spud Daddy, a potato-based restaurant in downtown Boise, stretched out onto the sidewalk for hours. Photos by Sean Ellis



Spud Daddy owner Thomas Watson, black shirt, serves customers during opening day June 19. The waiting line at the potato-based restaurant in downtown Boise stretched out onto the sidewalk for hours.

him a good feeling that the Spud Daddy concept is a winner.

Based on the Day One performance, “We need to quadruple our staff and buy more food,” he said. “The operation is going to have to get very fast. It’s clear that people want this and they want it in bulk.”

Spud Daddy has received support and encouragement from the Idaho Potato Commission, which is funded by Idaho potato farmers to help promote the state’s most famous product.

“This helps promotes our product,” said Jamey Higham, CEO of the potato commission. “I think it’s a great way to promote the Idaho potato brand. We’re excited about it.”

Oakley potato farmer Randy Hardy said he thinks it’s a great idea to promote the Idaho potato in the heart of Idaho’s largest city.

“Boise is not an agricultural center of Idaho and it’s great that they’re doing that there,” he said.

The restaurant is centered around the famous Idaho Russet potato, with plenty of possible toppings. It includes French fries, a potato ice cream that looks like a spud but is not, and a gift shop with scores of potato-themed items.

“We searched high and low for anything that was potato related to put in that gift shop; anything that we could find that featured potatoes,” Watson said. “We’re trying

to do something that hasn’t been done and we want to do it in a fun way.”

Watson is the person who conceived of and helped create Potato Days, a multiple-day celebration of the Idaho potato in the Boise area. That September event, going on its fourth year, attracts more than 20,000 people to Kleiner Park across from The Village in Meridian.

Potato Days organizers created a large commercial kitchen that turns out about 10,000 baked potatoes in two days. Watson said he thought, “We’ve gotten really good at baking potatoes; we should probably start a baked potato restaurant.”

That thinking led to Spud Daddy.

Watson said he couldn’t believe no one had tried opening a restaurant based solely on the Idaho potato before. He had a similar thought when he was vetting the Potato Days concept. He simply could not believe there wasn’t already an annual festival celebrating the Idaho potato in the Boise area.

“I asked the same question with Potato Days,” he said. “It was shocking. And to find out there’s no restaurant that is centered around just Idaho potatoes is probably an even bigger shock. Somebody else should have already done this. We almost felt a responsibility to do this.”

“It’s definitely an idea that has been thought of in the past and maybe even tried, maybe just not the right way,” Hardy said.

After going live with the restaurant, Watson said he now understands maybe why the idea hasn’t been accomplished before.

“The meal you are serving is a 90-minute cook time,” he said. “How do you figure out how to serve something that takes 90 minutes to cook, yet serve it every minute, and not run out? I can understand why this is a concept many people would run away from, but for me, I’m running toward it because I see the value of the Idaho potato and somebody should do it.”

For now, all the potatoes served at Spud Daddy are Russets. That may change some day, but whatever variety the spuds are, “they will always be Idaho potatoes,” Watson said. “Forever.”

Watson said potato commission staff have been very supportive of the Spud Daddy idea.

“The potato commission is ridiculously supportive,” he said. “Their chef is helping us and giving us tips and resources for, How do we properly store the potatoes; how do we bake the potatoes; what’s the best way to blanch a French fry?”

“They’re very interested in making sure we do this right because we’re representing the Idaho baked potato, not just potatoes,” he adds. “They don’t want to see us misrepresent the Idaho potato and I also don’t want to do that. We’re all treating this commodity as precious and want to make sure we do it the best possible way.” ■

Milk from U of I dairy helps win top cheese award

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

MOSCOW, Idaho – Brian Salmeri is often asked to divulge the secret behind his family's labneh cheese, which won a national blue ribbon at the recent Good Food Awards.

Salmeri, with Deary-based Brush Creek Creamery, simply credits their access to outstanding milk, as well as a strong partnership with the milk supplier — the University of Idaho Dairy Center located at the main campus in Moscow.

"You have to start out with a good base, and a good base is good milk," Salmeri said.

Labneh is a tangy, creamy cheese made

by straining the whey from yogurt; the cheese is ideal for spreading and is popular in Middle Eastern cuisine.

"The taste just explodes in your mouth, hitting all of your taste buds simultaneously," Salmeri said.

Brush Creek's labneh emerged victorious from a field of 1,200 cheeses to receive a top prize on June 28 in New York at the Good Food Awards, which are often described as the Oscars of the food and beverage industry.

They're now allowed to display the coveted Good Food Awards winner seal on product packaging.

Brush Creek buys about 357,000 pounds of milk per year from the U of I dairy, producing 40,000 pounds of a





Labneh cheese made by Brush Creek Creamery in Deary using milk from the University of Idaho Dairy Center is displayed beside the top prize it recently won at the June 28 Good Food Awards ceremony in New York.

Photo by Hannah Ruth Pettyjohn

variety of cheeses including types of blue cheese, brie, feta, cheddar, smoked gouda, Labneh and Havarti.

Many cheesemakers around the world add component parts, such as supplemental fat or protein, to their milk supply to achieve their desired specifications. Salmeri, however, believes Brush Creek gets the best results from an unadulterated milk supply, and U of I has gone to great lengths to accommodate the business.

For example, when the creamery needed to boost its butterfat levels, U of I added Jersey cows, known for producing milk with high fat content, to the herd.

“They’re providing exactly what I need,” Salmeri said. “I’ve been working with U of I for eight years now, and it’s an amazing partnership. I would not exist without them.”

The U of I dairy operated by the College

of Agricultural and Life Sciences has 86 milking cows, 74 heifers and 20 calves, including Holsteins, Jerseys and crosses of both breeds. The dairy is primarily a research and teaching center but also sells about 164,000 pounds of milk per month to Brush Creek, Ferdinand’s Ice Cream Shoppe at Washington State University and Darigold.

“We’ve been getting quite a few calls from a lot of different people about the Good Food Award, congratulating the dairy and the hard work all of our students have been doing,” Dairy Manager Alyssa Murillo said.

The dairy employs a staff of seven students and a full-time milker and parlor manager, who emphasize maintaining fresh bedding, clean facilities and optimal animal nutrition. The dairy is known for producing milk with exceedingly low somatic cell count — a measurement of

“They’re providing exactly what I need. I’ve been working with U of I for eight years now, and it’s an amazing partnership. I would not exist without them.”

— Brian Salmeri, Brush Creek Creamery

white blood cells in milk that tends to elevate as animal health declines.

“We just love these animals,” Murillo said. “They all have names, we treat them like our own, and we know that happy cows make great milk.”

Salmeri’s wife, Rebecca, began making cheese 25 years ago in her kitchen to use excess milk from her family’s dairy farm. Her father, Kevin Durkin, hired a French cheese consultant to teach her the craft.

In 2012, she expanded into a century-old, 8,200-square-foot brick building she renovated into a creamery, working with her childhood friend Lisa French.

The Salmeris’ friends Dawn Stevenson and Hannah Gentry have taken over as the primary Brush Creek cheesemakers.

Other family friends, Matthew and Avery Brandstadt, began making cheese in 2023, which they sell at a sandwich and coffee shop based in an old ranch and gristmill in Greycliff, Montana. The sister companies share recipes, and Brush Creek cheese is aged in the Brandstadts’ climate-controlled caves in Greycliff, a process that takes anywhere from 60 days to five years, depending on the variety.

Brush Creek cheeses are available at several locations, including Greycliff Mill, Pilgrim’s Market in Coeur d’Alene, Coeur d’Alene Resort, high-end resorts in Spokane, Washington, the Moscow Food Co-op and local farmers markets. It’s also sold through distributors in California. ■

OPPOSITE: Dawn Stevenson, left, Hannah Gentry, middle, and Debbie Yantis, right, hold the awards their Brush Creek Creamery won in the 2025 Idaho Milk Processors competition, hosted in Sun Valley. Photo courtesy of Salmeri family

Idaho potato acres drop by 5%



Photos by Sean Ellis

A potato field near American Falls is shown in this photo taken in late June. According to USDA, Idaho farmers planted 300,000 acres of spuds this year, down 5 percent from 315,000 last year.

“Growers planted fewer acres of table potatoes, due to extremely low prices and demand uncertainty. However, this year’s acreage reduction may not be enough to turn markets around.”

– Ben Eborn, owner, North American Potato Market News

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – As expected, Idaho potato acreage is down 5 percent this year compared with last year.

Will that be enough to turn a market that has been unkind to spud growers recently? Probably not, according to farmers and industry experts. But it’s a start, they add.

In a June 30 acreage report, the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that Idaho farmers planted 300,000 acres of spuds in 2026, down 5 percent compared with 315,000 in 2025.

USDA estimates U.S. growers planted 873,000 acres of potatoes in 2026, a 29,000-acre or 3 percent reduction compared with 2025.

The open market price that spud farmers in Idaho and the U.S. have been getting recently for

their potatoes is well below what it costs to produce them.

Many spud farmers were hoping for a big enough potato acreage reduction this year to significantly affect farm-level potato prices.

That does not appear to be the case.

“Growers planted fewer acres of table potatoes, due to extremely low prices and demand uncertainty,” North American Potato Market News owner Ben Eborn wrote in the July 2 edition of NAPMN. “However, this year’s acreage reduction may not be enough to turn markets around.”

The 15,000-acre reduction in Idaho spud acres was forecast in NAPMN’s April 2 edition.

How yields turn out will likely determine the supply and demand balance for spuds in 2026, Eborn added.

“Probably even more significant is what yields are going to do,” said Oakley potato farmer Randy Hardy. “What are we going to end up with at the end of the year?”

Farmers and potato industry leaders said this year’s acreage reduction is a positive start, even if it’s not as low as they had hoped.

“It’s kind of about where we thought it would land,” Hardy said about the 2026 potato acreage numbers. “It would be better if potato acreage was closer to 10 percent down, but it’s a good start.”

“It’s not as low as it needed to be, but it’s a good start,” said Idaho Potato Commission CEO Jamey Higham.

The potato commission does its own count of Idaho potato acres and this year’s IPC count came in at 298,915.

Idaho typically produces about a third of the nation’s total potato crop and spuds are this state’s top crop in terms of total farm-gate revenue. Idaho potato farmers typically bring in more than \$1 billion worth of farm-gate revenue each year.

When potato processing is added to the equation, potatoes bring in billions of dollars to Idaho’s economy each year.

According to USDA, eight states reported a downturn in planted potato acreage this year. The reductions came in Idaho (-15,000 acres), North Dakota (-3,000 acres), Colorado (-2,000),

Michigan (-2,000), Minnesota (-2,000), Nebraska (-2,000), Wisconsin (-2,000) and California (-1,000).

Potato acreage in Florida, Maine, Oregon, Texas and Washington is unchanged from 2025. No states reported an increase. Total U.S. spud acreage has declined from 966,000 in 2023 to 932,000 in 2024 to 902,000 in 2025 to 873,000 in 2026.

During that same period, Idaho potato acreage has gone from 330,000 in 2023 to 315,000 in 2024 and 2025 and 300,000 in 2026.

According to USDA, this year’s spud acreage is the nation’s lowest since 1952. However, potato yields are higher now than they were then. NAPMN forecasts total U.S. potato production this year could be down only 2 percent compared with last year because of expected higher average yields.

The USDA data, according to NAPMN, suggests that potato farmers reduced Russett acreage in several states.

“The downturn was driven by extremely low, unprofitable table potato prices,” Eborn wrote. “In addition, new varieties, yield increases and storage improvements continue to reduce the number of acres needed to meet current demand levels...”

According to Eborn, the planted area for frozen processing potatoes in Idaho is expected to increase this year, while table potato acreage ap-

pears to be flat or down slightly from last year. Contract volumes for dehy processing potatoes, he adds, are down significantly this year.

In the April 2 edition of NAPMN, Eborn wrote that potato growers “across the country are extremely concerned about current market conditions, rising production costs, the lack of profitable alternative crops, the ability to obtain financing, increasing global competition, and limited irrigation water supplies. In addition, North American growers also have a huge supply of potatoes from the 2025 crop in storage.”

Idaho’s potato acreage this year is the state’s second smallest since 2010’s 295,000 total. Idaho farmers also planted 295,000 acres in 2022. ■



Idaho farmers will harvest 5 percent fewer potato acres this year, according to USDA estimates.



There are many ways to use beans in your everyday diet

By Andi Woolf-Weibye
Idaho Bean Commission

It seems you can't turn on the news or flip through any social media pages these days without hearing about the current high cost of grocery prices. Anyone who enjoys eating shouldn't overlook beans as a rather inexpensive, high-protein, cholesterol-free and nutrient-dense food source.

Beans also have a high-fiber content, and diets that are high in fiber have been linked to reduced risks for things such as heart

disease, cancer, and other common health concerns.

Beans have a low GI score, which means they are digested slowly and supply your body with a steady and gradual release of energy instead of a rapid surge of glucose into the bloodstream. Studies have also shown that adding one cup of beans to a daily diet for three months significantly improves glycemic control and reduces A1c scores. It is advised to



AVOCADO-WHITE BEAN PROTEIN TOAST

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 slice bread, toasted (whole wheat suggested)
- ¼ avocado, mashed
- ½ cup canned white beans, rinsed and drained (Cannellini or Great Northern work well)
- Salt & ground pepper to taste
- Pinch of crushed red pepper

INSTRUCTIONS:

- **Toast Your Bread:** Pop your slice of bread into the toaster or under the broiler until you reach your desired color and crispness.
- **Mash the Toppings:** Combine the mashed avocado and the rinsed and drained white beans. Use the back of a fork to mash them together until you reach your desired consistency.

OPTIONAL TOPPINGS:

- Melt cheese on toast or add feta cheese to top
- Add an egg, boiled or fried
- Add desired herbs (cilantro, parsley, or dill to mash or on top)
- Pine Nuts and/or olive oil
- Lemon Juice to mash
- Whole beans to top



BEAN CHOCOLATE CAKE

INGREDIENTS:

- 420 g can kidney beans or butter beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 tablespoon water or coffee
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract, or more to taste
- 70 g raw cacao or cocoa powder
- 1 teaspoon GF baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 125 g Butter
- 5 eggs
- 140 g coconut sugar

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Puree the beans, water/coffee, 1 egg and vanilla until smooth. Set aside.
- Without washing the bowl, beat the butter and sugar on mid-speed for 30 seconds.
- Add the remaining eggs & beat for 20 seconds
- Add bean mixture & beat for 5 seconds.
- Add the cocoa powder, baking powder, baking soda, and salt and blend for 10 seconds.
- Pour batter into greased ring tin pan and bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean.
- Top with your favorite buttercream frosting!

pair beans with non-starchy vegetables, other lean proteins, and healthy fats to flatten your glycemic curve.

I personally believe that most agricultural commodities tend to get pigeon-holed; when you think of barley you probably think of beer or stew. When you think of wheat, bread is likely what immediately comes to mind. For beans, you probably envision a nice, hearty chili. However, beans are incredibly versatile. You can use them as a side dish, to bulk up a soup or broth, utilize them in baking, add them to a salad or serve them as a main course.

With recent advents of electric pressure cookers, gone are the days of babysitting simmering dry beans over the hot stove for hours. Time can be dependent on a few factors such as freshness of the beans as well as market class; but most have a standard cook time of only 20-40 minutes. An added tip: You can also reduce cook times by roughly 10 minutes if you soak your beans overnight.

Some great ways to use beans in your everyday diet:

- Make a large batch of beans and freeze them into small portions to reheat and add to meals.
- Puree beans for a spread over toast such as an Avocado-White Bean Protein Toast (recipe below) or add with ricotta cheese and herbs for a Mediterranean-style smear.
- Add ¼ - ½ cup of white (such as Great Northerns, Navy or Cannellini) or black beans directly into your blender to

thicken up and protein-boost your smoothies.

- Sprinkle kidney or beans on fresh salads or include in pasta salads.
- In certain recipes you can use beans as a 100% flourless base for baked goods and you can replace traditional flour-and-butter roux for a white bean puree (also see the recipe for a bean chocolate cake, above).

While more than 30 states grow dry beans commercially, Idaho consistently positions itself among the top five producers in the United States. More importantly, Idaho is the number one producer of bean seed in the country, providing the disease-free seed that farmers all over the world rely on to grow their own crops.

Idaho's dominance in the bean industry is a direct result of its unique geography with rich volcanic soils, precision irrigation control and stringent state planting guidelines.

Ultimately, whether you are enjoying beans in a traditional chili, utilizing them in your baking or enjoying a traditional green bean casserole at Thanksgiving, beans represent the very best in nutrition and plant-based protein, all the while supporting our local bean growers and dealers who produce a valuable commodity for the Idaho economy. ■

(Andi Woolf-Weibye is executive director of the Idaho Bean Commission.)



From pasture to market

By Nida Mannan

For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



Before most people have poured their first cup of coffee, Katrina Burt-Blount has already started her day.

At 4:30 a.m., she heads outside to milk the cow and begin the morning chores at Two Bees Farm and Garden near American Falls. There are cattle to check, pigs to feed and chickens, sheep and goats that may need attention.

During birthing season, the work does not always wait until morning.

Her 7-year-old daughter is often beside her, even when an animal goes into labor in the middle of the night.

"She actually helps me birth everything on the farm," Burt said. "If it's 2 o'clock in the morning, she wakes up with me."

The family raises beef cattle, hogs, sheep, goats and poultry. They also produce seasonal turkeys and occasionally take special requests. This year, one customer asked

for a Christmas goose, which led to four goslings temporarily brooding inside Burt's entryway.

The animals raised for retail cuts are processed and inspected at a USDA facility before the frozen meat is sold at the Portneuf Valley Farmers Market in Pocatello. Two Bees typically brings beef, pork, lamb and chicken, when chicken is available.

Poultry production is especially tied to eastern Idaho's seasons. Burt raises Cornish Cross chickens from spring through mid-fall, taking a break during the hottest part of the summer because the birds do not tolerate extreme heat well. The farm raises around 1,000 chickens in a typical year.

All of the farm's animals are pasture-raised, and the family uses rotational grazing along with grain feeding. Burt sources grain locally and mixes the feed

herself, adjusting it according to the nutritional needs of each species and animal.

A Nubian goat nursing triplets, for example, may need more protein and calcium to maintain her weight while producing milk.

"Everybody requires different needs," Burt said. "We mix and grind all of our feed ourselves."

That close attention continues long before the first customer arrives at the farmers market.

Preparing for a full market season requires Burt to estimate how many cattle, hogs, lambs and chickens customers will purchase. She must also coordinate processing dates and make sure she has enough freezer space. She cannot process an entire season's livestock at once, so animals are sent in smaller groups throughout the summer.

By early in the current market season, the farm had already sold meat from three cattle and 11 hogs, with another five hogs sent for processing.

"It's a guessing game," she said.

Friday mornings are devoted to market preparation. Burt counts every cut remaining in the smaller freezers she takes to Pocatello, records the inventory and restocks from the larger freezers in the farm's shop. She also checks the canopy, signs, cash box and other supplies before loading up.

On Saturday, she still wakes at 4:30 to complete the farm chores. She and her husband usually leave American Falls around 6 or 6:15 a.m. to set up their booth.

For Two Bees Farm and Garden, the market is more than a weekly sales stop. It gives customers an opportunity to ask how their food was raised, what the animals were fed and where the meat was processed.

Many shoppers are surprised to find locally raised meat sold alongside vegetables, baked goods and other market offerings. Others arrive looking for a product they have struggled to find elsewhere.

This season, lamb has been the farm's strongest seller.

"Almost every single customer that has come up and bought lamb from me this year has said, 'I have been looking for someone selling lamb, and I cannot find anybody,'" Burt said.

The farm began selling meat after Burt saw a need in her own community during the COVID-19 pandemic. A family she had known for years was struggling to find meat. She had hogs ready

"We are more about getting healthier food to families than we are dollar signs."

— Katrina Burt-Blount, Two Bees Farm and Garden

but could not find a processor with an opening.

Snyder's Custom Cuts in Chubbuck agreed to take three hogs on short notice. The processed meat was ready the day before Thanksgiving, allowing Burt to deliver it directly to the family.

That experience helped establish a purpose for the business.

"We are more about getting healthier food to families than we are dollar signs," she said.

Today, the farmers market allows Two Bees Farm and Garden to continue that work one package at a time. Customers can see photographs from the farm, ask questions and learn what happens before a pork chop, leg of lamb or package of ground beef reaches the freezer.

For Burt, the philosophy behind it all is simple: "Functional over fancy."

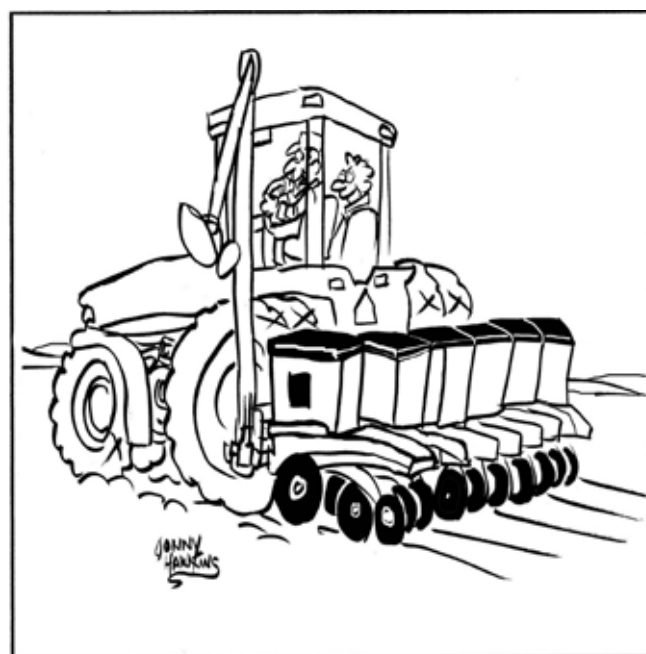
Behind the blue canopy and neatly packed freezers is a working livestock operation, months of planning and a family willing to begin each day before sunrise. ■

Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins



"Sometimes, you just gotta get out there ... weather you like it or not."



"Yes, Son, those are our treasure boxes, that plant the seeds in the ground and one day will sprout cash crops."

Are your trees a fire liability?

By **Audra Cochran**
University of Idaho

One of the most common questions I get from family forest owners and other backyard tree owners is whether they need to remove the trees around their home to be wildfire prepared.

The answer typically centers around what the owner's goals are.

Most of us live in the country because we enjoy having trees on our property. They provide shade, privacy, wildlife habitat, aesthetics, and are often one of the reasons we purchased the property in the first place.

One of my favorite wildfire preparedness spokespersons, Idaho Department of Lands' (IDL) #FirePreventionJen, often says, "Concrete and paving around your home is not the only way to be wildfire prepared."

The goal of wildfire preparedness is not to eliminate trees from the landscape. The goal is to manage vegetation in a way that reduces risk to your home, family, and forest. There are practical steps landowners can take to reduce wildfire risk while still maintaining the trees and landscape they enjoy.

August is often Idaho's peak wildfire season, and this year is proving to be no exception. Hot temperatures, dry vegetation, and the potential for lightning storms create conditions that can quickly turn a small ignition into a large wildfire. While landowners cannot control the weather, they can influence how fire behaves on their property.

The area immediately surrounding homes, shops, barns, and other structures deserves special attention. During a wildfire, embers can travel far ahead of the main fire front, igniting vulnerable materials around buildings.

Start by removing flammable materials such as wood piles, debris, and dry vegetation located close to structures. Keep roofs, gutters, decks, and porches free of pine needles, leaves, and other debris that can easily ignite.

Regularly mowing grasses and reducing dense vegetation around buildings can also help create defensible space. A green lawn can be a good fire break and also helps keep your house cooler.

If a tree near your home is especially important to you, it can often be incorporated into your defensible space plan. However, that tree will require additional maintenance.

Branches should not touch buildings, decks, or roofs. Lower limbs should be pruned to reduce ladder fuels, and needles or leaves should be cleaned up regularly.

Avoid storing firewood, equipment, or other combustible materials beneath the tree, and maintain nonflammable or well-managed ground cover around its base.

No tree located near a structure is completely without risk, but proper maintenance can significantly reduce the likelihood that it becomes a pathway for fire.

Reducing highly flammable fuels throughout the forest is equally important. Many family forests in Idaho contain more trees



Providing a well-maintained buffer between 5-30 feet by your home and outbuildings can help provide adequate fire breaks.
Idaho Department of Lands photo



Photo by Idaho Firewise

Before and after: Thoughtful clearing of dense vegetation around homes can drastically help reduce the risk of wildfire overtaking your home, while still allowing for some greenspace.

than the site can comfortably sustain. Overstocked stands create competition for water, nutrients, and sunlight while increasing wildfire risk.

Thinning overcrowded stands reallocates resources and allows the remaining trees to grow more vigorously and subsequently become more resilient to drought, insects, and disease. Pruning lower branches helps prevent ground or surface fires from moving into the tree canopy, where fires become more difficult to control.

Dead and dying trees should be removed when practical, particularly near homes, roads, and frequently used areas.

Slash generated from thinning and pruning projects should also be addressed. Chipping, piling and burning during approved seasons, or other disposal methods, can help reduce the accumulation of surface fuels that contribute to fire intensity.

Knowing when to hire help

I often receive calls from landowners looking for a free or inexpensive solution to wildfire mitigation. While University of Idaho Extension and our agency partners offer many educational resources at no cost, implementing forest management practices often requires an investment of time, equipment, or professional expertise.

The University of Idaho Wildland Fire

Center is a relatively new resource offered by University of Idaho and Idaho Department of Lands. Its goal is to better help people “coexist” with wildfire across Idaho and the region living in the wildland urban interface.

The WFC team is spread across the state of Idaho, and can help with planning, communication, collaboration building, and other areas of wildfire planning landowners or fire volunteers may need, often free of charge.

To contact a team member or learn more about what resources WFC offers, visit <https://www.uidaho.edu/natural-resources/research/wildland-fire-center>

For larger projects, consider visiting with several contractors before work begins. Every property is different, and it is important to find someone who understands your goals and can help you achieve them.

The lowest bid is not always the best fit, particularly when the long-term health of your forest is involved.

Remember, some of these practices may fall within the Idaho Forest Practices Act and your IDL Private Forestry Specialist may be able to assist you as well. And be sure that measures taken on your land follow best management practices.

Preparing for wildfire does not mean turning your property into a parking lot. It means making thoughtful management decisions about the vegetation around your home, within your forest, and along your access routes. The best time to prepare is before smoke appears on the horizon.

You do not have to tackle every project in a single year. Even small improvements made over time can reduce wildfire risk, improve forest health, and provide peace of mind knowing you have taken steps to protect your property. ■

(Audra Cochran is an Extension Educator in Clearwater County. She can be reached at audrac@uidaho.edu.)



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DIRT ROAD DISCUSSIONS PODCAST

Episode 107 - Watt's the Cost of Power?

As energy demand surges across Idaho, what does it mean for the farmers and ranchers who depend on affordable, reliable power? We sit down with Eric Olsen, Partner at Echo Hawk & Olsen, to break down the growing strain on the grid, the rise of large energy users, and how it could impact irrigation, input costs, and the future of agriculture. It's a conversation that connects power lines to pivot lines.



ISDA Leads Agricultural Policy Tour to Canada to Strengthen Idaho-Alberta Partnership

Sydney Kennedy, Idaho State Department of Agriculture

Trade relationships, market access and producer-to-producer connections were at the center of the Idaho State Department of Agriculture's recent agricultural policy tour to Alberta, Canada.

Joined by Lt. Gov. Scott Bedke and representatives from ten Idaho businesses and organizations, ISDA led the tour focused on the longstanding partnership between Idaho and Alberta and reinforced the importance of maintaining strong relationships with one of Idaho agriculture's most valuable trading partners.

Meetings with Alberta government officials, commodity groups and producers gave the Idaho delegation an opportunity to discuss issues affecting agriculture on both sides of the border and strengthen relationships with Canadian counterparts.

Canada continues to be Idaho's largest market for food and agricultural products. In 2025, exports to Canada totaled more than \$451.8 million, accounting for 31% of the state's agricultural exports. Idaho's leading agricultural exports to Canada include live cattle, potatoes, grains and seed.

"Idaho and Alberta share a strong agricultural heritage, with similar values and a commitment to supporting our farmers and ranchers," said Lt. Gov. Scott Bedke. "Our discussions with Alberta officials and producers made it clear that we have far more in common than differences, and we look forward to building on this strong partnership for years to come."

This visit comes at an important time as the United States, Canada and Mexico continue discussions about the future of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). On July 1, the United States announced it would not renew the agreement in its current form. Although the agreement provides significant value to Idaho agriculture by supporting reliable market access with two of Idaho's largest trading partners, it also presents opportunities for the U.S. to address other aspects of the agreement. In the meantime, the agreement remains in place until it terminates in 2036.

For Idaho producers, Canada is more than a neighboring country, they are a critical partner. Idaho's agricultural exports to Canada span a wide range of commodities, with live cattle being the largest agricultural export. In 2024 and 2025, Idaho exported more than 235,000 head of cattle to Canada, valued at more than \$262 million.

"This policy tour provided valuable opportunities for commodity-specific conversations with industry and government leaders, allowing us to better understand shared priorities, address challenges and continue building the productive partnerships that benefit producers on both sides of the border," said ISDA Director Chanel Tewalt. "Strong trade relationships are critical to the success of Idaho agriculture, and opportunities like this policy tour help ensure those relationships continue to grow."

As trade discussions continue, maintaining strong relationships with international partners such as Alberta will remain an important part of supporting Idaho agriculture and expanding opportunities for the state's producers.



Idaho State Department of Agriculture

DID YOU KNOW?

Idaho has over 55 farmers markets with local vendors providing Idaho grown and raised products throughout the state.

IDAHO FARMERS MARKET MONTH

Governor Little has officially proclaimed August as the fourth annual Idaho Farmers Market Month. In celebration, Idaho Preferred and the Idaho Farmers Market Association are joining forces to recognize the vital role farmers markets play in supporting Idaho's economy and enhancing our way of life.

Farmers markets are an essential part of Idaho's local food community, providing convenient access to a wide variety of Idaho-grown and Idaho-crafted products. In addition to fresh, seasonal fruits and vegetables, shoppers can find locally raised meats, artisan cheeses, honey, baked goods, flowers, specialty food products, and handcrafted items. Beyond offering high-quality local products, farmers markets create opportunities for consumers to connect directly with the farmers, ranchers, and food producers behind them, supporting local businesses, strengthening Idaho's agricultural economy, and bringing communities together.

VISIT YOUR LOCAL FARMERS MARKET THIS MONTH AND CELEBRATE WITH US!

IDAHO FARMERS MARKET FINDER

The Idaho Preferred website is your one-stop resource for discovering local Idaho agricultural products and experiences. Our comprehensive Farmers Market Finder makes it simple to locate markets and vendors near you.

With over 55 markets statewide, the directory lets you filter by region, day of the week, drive-thru availability, mobile markets, and whether they accept SNAP or participate in Double Up Food Bucks. If you're passionate about supporting Idaho farmers, this tool makes it easy to find a farmers market that fits your needs.

WWW.IDAHOPREFERRED.COM/PRODUCTS/FARMERS-MARKETS/

IDAHO FARM STAND DIRECTORY

Idaho is home to more than 80 farm, ranch, and dairy stands that make it easy to enjoy fresh, locally grown products while supporting the families who produce them. From seasonal fruits and vegetables to meats, flowers, baked goods, cheeses, and handcrafted specialties, farm stands offer a direct connection to Idaho agriculture and the people behind it. Whether you're looking for the freshest ingredients or hoping to shop local, our statewide Farm Stand Directory makes it easy to discover stands and markets near you.

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Photos by Sean Ellis

Taproots Executive Director Casey O'Leary, in green pants, talks to aspiring farmers April 30 during an Emerging Farmers Field Day in Boise's Dry Creek area.

Taproots holds Emerging Farmers Field Day

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE – A new organization in Idaho's Treasure Valley area seeks to create a farm incubator where new farmers can rent small pieces of land, share resources and learn from more experienced farmers.

Called Taproots Farm Hub, the group hopes to purchase a 50- to 200-acre piece of land where emerging farmers can share land, resources, training and market opportunities with like-minded agricultural producers.

On April 30, Taproots invited interested participants to visit five small farms in Boise's Dry Creek area while learning more about its vision.

About 50 people attended the Emerging Farmers Field Day, which included students from the College of Western Idaho's horticulture program.

Taproots Executive Director Casey O'Leary guided the tour and spoke about the group's plans.

She said high land costs and limited knowledge about running a successful small farm are obstacles to would-be farmers gaining a foothold in the industry.

Ada County is one of the state's hot spots for diminishing farmland, as development spurred by rapid population growth leads to more and more farm ground being paved over.

That makes it difficult to find and afford land to farm on, said O'Leary, who farmed in the area for 18 years and taught horticulture at CWI.

“I think something like this Taproots program could be really cool if it gets going and funded. Linking potential farmers into land arrangements would be huge.”

— Justin Moore, owner, Fiddler's Green Farm

“We could teach you how to be an amazing farmer, but where are you going to do that?” she asked during the field day.

If Taproot's vision comes to fruition, many emerging farmers could learn the business while sharing the burden with like-minded folks, O'Leary said.

“We can have shared markets and then we can get into markets none of us could get into on our own,” she said.

A common theme among the five farms visited during the tour was that each of them leases the land they farm on. Another common theme is that those leases are tenuous, at best.

The owners of one of the farms hasn't even discussed how long the lease is with the landowner.

“It's harder to invest in a longer-term crop” when you don't own the land, said Whistlepig Farm owner Lyndsey Mulherin.

An incubator farm like the one Taproots is working toward could help solve the problem of tenuous leases, O'Leary said.

Fiddler's Green Farm owner Justin Moore admitted he pretty much lucked into the six-acre piece of land he farms on. The landowner didn't know him, but a phone call from the nearby farmer he used to work for was enough for him to secure a lease.

Like most of the other farms visited during the field day, Fiddlers Green has a Community Supported Agriculture program and sells to local co-ops and restaurants.

Moore said it's not that easy to obtain land and start farming in the fast-growing Treasure Valley area.

“I think something like this Taproots



Fiddler's Green Farm owner Justin Moore addresses aspiring farmers April 30 during an Emerging Farmers Field Day in Boise's Dry Creek area. Moore spoke about the challenges he faced getting started as a farmer.

program could be really cool if it gets going and funded,” he told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation. “Linking potential farmers into land arrangements would be huge.”

O'Leary told IFBF the field day is a part of Taproots' outreach efforts, “Where we're trying to bring together folks who want to learn how to farm and help them to see what functioning, mixed- vegetable, diversified, small-scale farming operations look like.”

She said Taproots hopes to obtain a long-term lease – at least 50 years – on a 50- to 200-acre piece of land that it could sub-lease to emerging small-scale farmers.

“They can have access to shared equipment, shared infrastructure, shared markets if they want them,” she said. “And access to training. They can come and learn about farming. They can also learn about business. And then once they've trained, they can get their own piece of land...”

The Taproots initiative obtained grant funding through USDA to start the effort, and the group just launched a capital campaign.

The startup costs are not a really high hurdle, but obtaining the land will be a challenge, she said. However, it's one she's confident Taproots can achieve.

The group is currently looking for land

in either Ada or Canyon county.

“We're looking for somebody who's willing to work with us for the long term,” O'Leary said.

“There are people here on this field day who want to have a spot on this incubator,” she added. “There are many people who are looking for land to farm on who don't know how to get started.”

One of the aspiring farmers who joined the field day was Jack Vance, who is only 12 but has known since he was about 5 that he wants to farm some day.

He said he joined the tour to learn from people who are already farming.

“I was hoping to pick up on how to farm and what people are doing so I can put that into my future career,” he said.

O'Leary said while obtaining the land Taproots is seeking won't be easy, she's confident the organization's vision is achievable.

“This is an idea whose time has come,” she said. “There are so many people who have been working in the local food movement for so many years who understand exactly how many different interlocking problems this solves. So I'm confident we're going to find the right folks who have the land we need, who have the funding support we need.” ■

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