Idaho Farm Bureau
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FROM SERVICE TO SOIL

The Zipline

By Zippy Duvall
President, American Farm Bureau Federation

Something for everyone at the American Farm Bureau Convention

Registration is open for the 2026 American Farm Bureau Convention in Anaheim, California, January 9-14. This is our flagship event, and our team is pulling out all the stops to inspire farmers, ranchers and partners across agriculture to imagine, grow, and lead together in 2026.

To help get you excited for all that we have in store, here's a little preview.

Attendees can expect a robust lineup of workshops to learn together and explore ways to grow their businesses and leadership skills in 2026. Convention workshops will cover the top issues facing agriculture and the latest trends in member and consumer engagement.

Come ready to hear about the hot public policy issues for 2026, get a preview of the economic

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The President's Desk

By Bryan Searle
President, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Times are rough in farm country right now

Agriculture in the U.S. and Idaho is in a crisis mode right now and many farmers are struggling to stay in business.

Many agricultural producers are at or near a breaking point right now. They have exhausted their resources and equity. They may no longer qualify for bank loans, they are in real danger of having to stop producing food and fiber.

This is caused by declining crop prices on almost all commodities, coupled with increasing production expenses.

The prices that farmers receive for the agricultural commodity they produce have been declining for the past couple of years.

Meanwhile, the overall cost of the inputs they need to produce these commodities – labor, fuel, seed, equipment, fertilizers, etc. – has not dropped. In fact, it's reached record levels.

Here's an example: According to USDA data released Sept. 3, the total value of crop production in Idaho in 2024 was $4.8 billion, down 12 percent from 2023.

Meanwhile, that same USDA data shows that

See **SEARLE,** page 6

Inside Farm Bureau

By Zak Miller
CEO, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Barn lights

As the days grow shorter and work hours don't, the need for light becomes critical. Every farm, ranch, or home has that one light that matters most when the sun goes down.

For me, especially in the fall, my mind drifts to the light pole in the horse corral and the lights that illuminate our barn.

It's not the light itself that captivates; it's the feeling I associate with it.

On my family ranch, we often catch our horses and leave the barn before dawn. Most of our work happens miles away, requiring a trailer ride before the real day begins.

There's an unwritten competition to be the first to flip on the barn lights when horse work is needed.

As we travel toward the barn in the early morning darkness, those lights become visible from a distance, letting us gauge how early—or late—we are to catch our horses.

The morning barn light represents possibility.

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MAGAZINE CONTACTS:
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation
EDITOR (208) 239-4292 • ADS (208) 239-4279
E-MAIL: seanellis@idahofb.org
ADS: advertising@idahofb.org
web: www.idahofb.org

COVER: According to USDA, 8 percent of Idaho farmers have served in the U.S. military, including Dan Elliott, shown here. See story on page 8. Photo by Jacob Christensen

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Photo by Sean Ellis

A potato field near American Falls is harvested in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo. Total net farm income in Idaho was down 13 percent in 2024 compared with 2023 and it was down 30 percent compared with 2022.

Total Idaho net farm income down substantially in 2024

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – The total value of agricultural production in Idaho rose 3 percent last year and hit a record level. However, expenses rose at a higher rate and as a result, total net farm income in Idaho is down substantially.

According to USDA data released Sept. 3, the total value of agricultural production in Idaho in 2024 was $12.6 billion, up 3 percent from 2023.

That's a record, but total farm and ranch production expenses also hit a record and rose twice as fast as total ag value in the state.

The USDA data shows intermediate farm production expenses in Idaho totaled $7.2 billion in 2024, up 6 percent from 2023. Intermediate farm expenses include things like feed and

seed purchases, fertilizers, pesticides, fuel, electricity, marketing, storage and transportation.

America's farmers and ranchers are facing extreme economic pressures that threaten the longterm viability of the U.S. agriculture sector.

When total farm production expenses are added up, total net farm income in Idaho in 2024 came in at $2.6 billion, down 13 percent from 2023 and down 30 percent compared with 2022.

Net farm income is what's left over after total expenses are deducted from total income. Think of it as the farmer's paycheck and it's down 30 percent over the past two years.

The Sept. 3 USDA data includes the first state-level estimates of farm income for 2024 and it shows Idaho's livestock sector is faring quite a bit better than the state's crop sector. The data show the total value of animal and animal product production in Idaho in 2024 was $7.5 billion, an increase of 17 percent compared with 2023.

On the other hand, the total value of crop production in Idaho was $4.8 billion in 2024, down 12 percent from 2023.

It's the same story this year, said Teton farmer Dwight Little.

"On the crop side, it's pretty tough right now," he said. "Everything is in the tank right now, except cattle and calves. Thank goodness we have some cows. They really help."

Little said sometimes the crop side of his farm subsidizes the cows, "but this year the cows are going to subsidize the farm."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture data on value of production differs somewhat from USDA estimates for farm cash receipts, which is what the farmer or rancher gets directly for their commodity. Total value of production includes other farm income such as machine and custom work, federal commodity insurance indemnities, and cash rent received by operator landlords.

The data show that total farm and ranch production expenses in Idaho continue to rise in most categories. For example, total expenses for livestock and poultry purchases hit $1 billion in 2024, up from $808 million in 2023. Seed purchases totaled $420 million, up from $361 million.

Total statewide expenses for pesticide purchases hit $379 million in 2024, up from $332 million in 2023, total fertilizer costs hit $750 million, up from $609 million, and expenses for machine hire and custom work totaled $167 million, up from $112 million.

Total irrigation expenses in 2024 hit $106 million, up from $84 million in 2023.

The data does show that some expenses decreased.

For example, total feed purchases in Idaho dropped from $2.4 billion in 2023 to $2.2 billion in 2024, total fuel and oil costs decreased from $378 million to $365 million, and marketing, storage and transportation costs dropped from $220 million to $208 million.

The assistance that Idaho farmers and ranchers receive from the federal government is already rather low, especially when compared with other states. It fell even more in 2024.

According to USDA, direct government payments to Idaho ranchers and farmers totaled $96 million in 2024, down from $129 million in 2023. That $96 million total amounts to 0.8 percent of the total value of agricultural production in Idaho in 2024.

When everything is tallied up – total ag production income minus expenses – the data show that the average paycheck for Idaho's 22,000-plus farms and ranches decreased substantially in 2024 compared with 2023 and was down by almost a third from 2022.

Rupert farmer Mike Wilkins said 2025 is no better on the crop side.

"The input prices this year are atrocious," he said. "It's going to be a tough year. We'll hold it together, but it's a tough son of a gun out there." ■

DUVALL

Continued from page 2

outlook for agriculture, engage with leading agriculture topics in the MAHA era, learn more about mental health initiatives, and consider growth strategies for beginning farmers.

Beyond our workshop lineup, we also have special sessions throughout the weekend that give all attendees an opportunity to engage further and to sharpen their advocacy and storytelling skills.

The Farm Bureau Women's Leadership Committee will host its annual meeting on Sat., Jan. 10, which will feature an inspiring keynote from life coach and cattle rancher, Coach Kiah, as well as networking opportunities to help us kickoff the International Year of the Woman Farmer.

The Promotion and Engagement Committee will host its annual Communicate, Collaborate and Influence (or CCI) training that same day, where they will explore strategies to engage with consumers. The Greenscreen Farmer, Jon Dinsmore, will share his story and how he uses social media to engage with millions right from his farm.

We also are hoping for some of Southern California's signature sunshine as we have a great lineup of local tours to offer attendees. Whether you are looking to see and sample local agriculture or get a behind-the-scenes look at historic California sites, we have got a tour for you.

I also hear there's a pretty famous mouse, who lives just a few blocks from the Convention Center, if you are looking to add in some family fun while you're in California.

We've got all you could wish for when it comes to networking and learning about the latest innovation at our Trade Show. Stop by the new Ag Insights Hub where our sponsors and exhibitors will showcase their agriculture knowledge and share problem-solving strategies and helpful solutions.

Our Cultivation Center Stage will feature an exciting lineup of speakers and maybe a live podcast or two—stay tuned for more there! And of course, the showcase event on the stage there will be the live Final Four round of the Ag Innovation Challenge.

Come see what these innovative entrepreneurs have to offer your farm or ranch business. Then stop by our County Activities of Excellence booths to see the amazing programs our grassroots members have created to enrich and serve their communities.

Last, but certainly not least, we have an inspiring lineup for our general sessions. We have reimagined our main stage to bring renewed excitement to our time together as a Farm Bureau family.

At our general sessions, we'll honor those who have served agriculture and celebrate leaders who are imagining ways to grow and lead in agriculture. We're excited to feature everyone's favorite, again, the Farm Dog of the Year winner. We will honor our Veteran Farmer of the Year, and we'll announce the winners of this year's competitive Young Farmer and Rancher events. Then to close out our final general session, we'll welcome special keynote speaker Tim Tebow.

Finally, I want to extend a special invitation to young leaders across agriculture and Farm Bureau. We will host a special Empowering Young Leaders Reception this year, and we hope this will encourage and inspire young leaders on their leadership journey as we celebrate them together.

I hope this preview has you excited for the 2026 AFBF Convention and inspires you to register today. Whether you are still making plans or already packing your bags, I invite you to check out more details and exciting announcements on our convention website: https://annualconvention.fb.org/.

We'll see you in Anaheim! ■

SEARLE

Continued from page 2

total Idaho intermediate farm expenses – this includes things like feed and seed purchases, fertilizers, pesticides, fuel, electricity, marketing, storage and transportation – were up 6 percent in 2024 compared with 2023.

Even someone who is not great at math can see the problem here and it's a problem that has been going on for more than three years now and has reached the breaking point for many farms.

As bad as it was in 2024, it's even worse this year.

The American Farm Bureau Federation board of directors has had many conversations and discussions recently about the financial difficulties facing farmers.

I sit on that board and can report that those discussions have been aggressive and detailed.

As a result of these conversations and directives, AFBF recently sent letters to President Donald Trump and Congress outlining the severe economic pressures farmers are facing.

"America's farmers and ranchers are facing extreme economic pressures that threaten the long-term viability of the U.S. agriculture sector," both letters state. "Due to insufficient action over the last several years, an alarming number of farmers are financially underwater as policies have failed to address the spiraling farm economy and provide long-term certainty for American agriculture."

The letters add: "Persistent cost pressures from labor, regulatory compliance, fertilizer, and energy have eroded margins, while weak commodity prices and uneven global competition have strained farm finances. Crop receipts have fallen sharply since 2022, eroding the cash flow and equity farmers rely on to weather downturns…."

The letters add: "The American Farm Bureau urges Congress

and the Administration to take action to stabilize and strengthen the farm economy and build a foundation for economic viability sector wide."

They call for a "renewed national commitment to U.S. agriculture through swift, decisive action on policies that restore farmers' ability to stay in business, to rebuild market access and secure the financial resilience of the rural economy."

The longer-term policy actions the letters call for include:

- Fair and enforceable trade agreements that open markets and ensure reciprocal access for U.S. products.
- Restoration of whole milk in schools, giving children access to nutritious U.S. dairy products.
- Protection of interstate commerce by opposing and challenging current or future state laws that undermine market consistency, competition, and transparency.
- Investigation into pricing structures for major agricultural inputs to address market imbalances that artificially inflate production costs beyond normal market fluctuations, paired with stronger enforcement of laws and regulations that ensure transparency and fairness in agricultural markets.
- Prioritization of American-grown fruits and vegetables in federal and institutional purchasing programs.

In the shorter-term, the letters also ask for bridge payments before the end of 2025 to help struggling farmers stay afloat.

"These payments must be robust enough to address sector-wide gaps and provide meaningful support as the federal government works to recalibrate trade strategies, stabilize prices, and strengthen key market relationships," the letters state.

Initially, discussions among AFBF board members about these bridge payments centered around row crops, such as soybeans and wheat.

Because the board includes representation among the Western states, we were able to ensure the language in the letters included specialty crops, which include vegetables and fruit.

This is important for Idaho and all of the Western states because we grow a lot of specialty crops.

Because we have a seat on the board, we were able to speak up and ensure specialty crops were also included in that request for bridge payments.

These policy actions requested in the letter would represent good first steps toward helping to address some of the financial hardships being faced in farm country right now. ■

MILLER

Continued from page 2

Fresh horses stand ready, and with them comes excitement: Will the young colt work today? Will this new rope or bit make a difference?

There's the thrill of trying out a new horse or relying on a steady steed that never disappoints.

But there's also nervous energy: Will the plan work? Was the gate left open? Will the trucks arrive on time? Will the weather cooperate? What if that new horse bucks?

The pre-dawn barn light embodies energy, excitement, and dreams—the freshness of morning mixed with optimism for what's to come.

Add in young, sleepy, wide-eyed kids eager to prove themselves, and that morning light becomes almost magical.

But for every action, there's an opposite reaction. If the morning light represents what can be, the evening light represents what has been.

That same light in the darkness after dusk often brings as much relief as it did excitement hours earlier. Tired horses and cowboys finally reach the end of a long, sometimes incredible, sometimes frustrating day.

'Each of us has our own barn lights—both figuratively and literally—that, if we let them, can illuminate our optimism, enthusiasm, and belief in ourselves and our talents.'

The memories flood in the adventure and the wrecks, the near misses and missed opportunities, the significant decisions and well-trained horses, kids learning on the fly, and helping at just the right moment.

But also, the calf that got away, the stray animals in the herd, the endless list of hits and misses.

The evening light represents a long day and the opportunity to rest, recover, and prepare for tomorrow. It marks the beginning of relief—the easing of bruises, aches, and soreness for both man and beast.

A meal and rest await.

This is life on a cattle ranch, but really, this is life in general. Not every day goes to plan. Not every goal is achieved.

There are equal chances for great success and epic failure. But those barn lights never really change. They continue to shine in the darkness, lighting our way.

Each of us has our own barn lights—both figuratively and literally—that, if we let them, can illuminate our optimism, enthusiasm, and belief in ourselves and our talents.

Those lights represent sanctuary from the battle or the beginning of celebration, and often a bit of both. Because the sun comes up and the sun goes down, and the barn lights fill in the gaps.

Hopefully, we all choose to use those lights to encourage us toward good, while also offering refuge and rest along the journey. ■

STILL SERVING, BY FARMING

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – They once helped preserve the American way of life by serving their country in the United States military. Now, they help feed the nation while serving as farmers and ranchers.

According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, there were 43,333 total agricultural producers in Idaho during the 2022 census year. Of that total, 3,662 were military veterans.

That means roughly 8 percent of Idaho's farmers and ranchers have served in the U.S. military, either in the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines or Coast Guard.

Nationally, about the same percentage of farmers and ranchers were military veterans in 2022, according to the ag census.

Some of those farmer veterans served one tour while others served for many years, but everyone who has served in the military has done their part, says David Colton, who runs about 200 head of cattle near Malad and served in the military for almost 39 years.

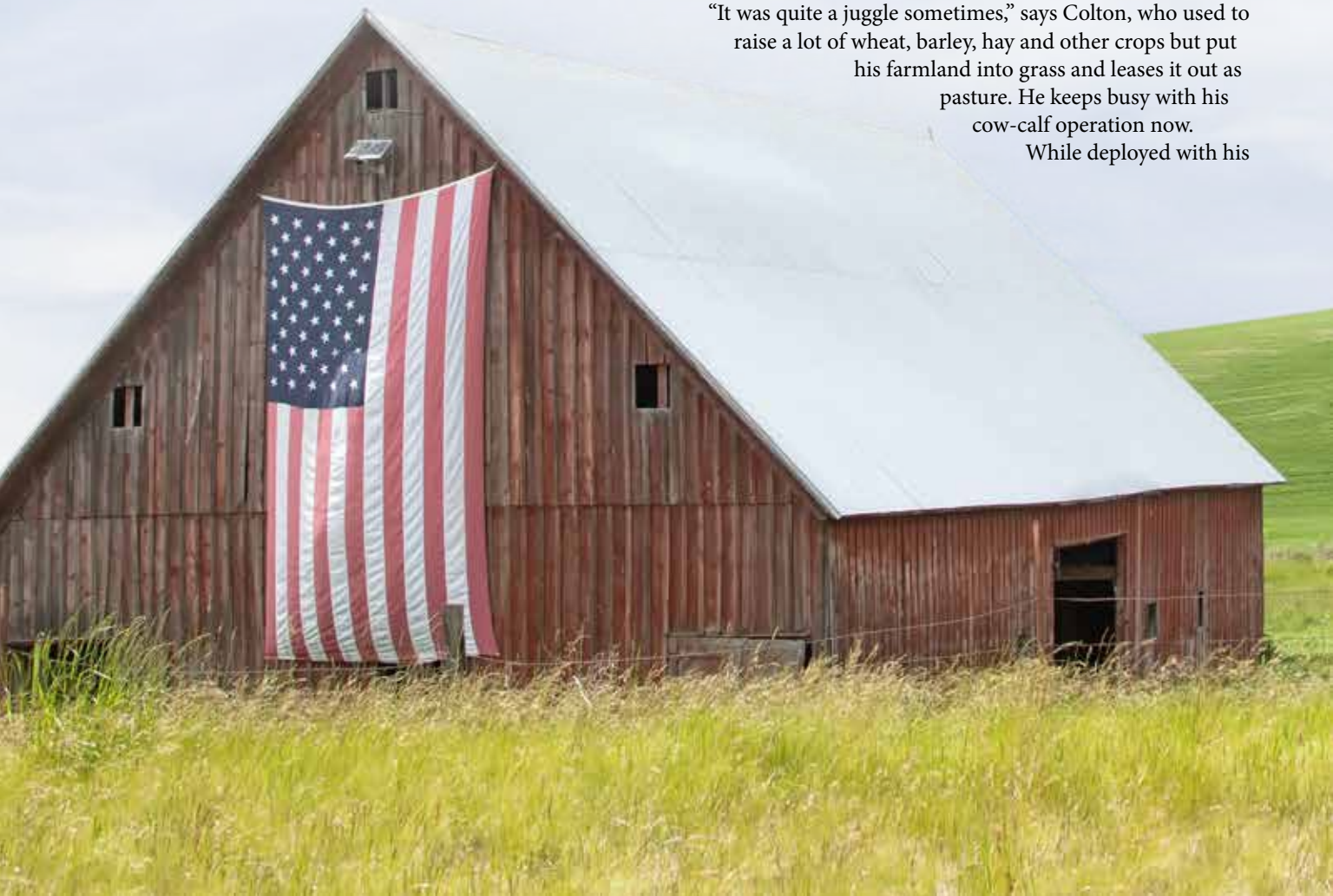
"Everybody does their part while they're in," he says. "It takes all of us to do it."

Colton, 75, has served on the Oneida County Farm Bureau board since 2001. He served his country in the Utah Air National Guard from 1972 to 2010.

Earlier in his service, he often deployed during the winter and farmed during the summer.

"It was quite a juggle sometimes," says Colton, who used to raise a lot of wheat, barley, hay and other crops but put his farmland into grass and leases it out as pasture. He keeps busy with his cow-calf operation now.

While deployed with his



unit, he did narcotics intervention work in South America.

"It was fairly safe," Colton says. "There were always these knotheads who would try to take a pot shot at us … but the cartels really did not want to get into a fight with us."

Then came the 9/11 terrorist attacks; his unit was activated and he deployed to the Middle East three times.

His unit ended up losing three people. One was killed, one lost a leg and the other suffered shrapnel wounds.

"Iraq was very stressful," Colton says. "We were hit with well over 100 rockets on our position. Ninety-nine percent of them missed us, but some of them got pretty darn close. That was stressful, and it was a sad time when we had to put our buddy on that plane and send him home."

He says his experiences on the farm fixing things and just plain getting things done came in handy during his military service.

"We got into a lot of situations where I used my farm knowledge of getting something done despite the obstacles," he says.

Dan Elliott, 80, lives a relatively quiet life now raising hay and doing a lot of custom farm work in Sagel, just south of Sandpoint. But his life wasn't always that quiet.

He did two 13-month tours in Vietnam while serving as an aircraft electronics technician in the Air Force from 1962 to 1969. He doesn't like talking about his time in Vietnam with people who weren't there – "Unless you were there, you wouldn't get it" – but does admit he was in some scary situations there.

Elliott, who now serves as the Bonner County Farm Bureau president, says the hardest part about his time in the military was being away from home.

"Being away from home, being away from family ... was the hard part," he says.

Elliott, who was raised on a dairy operation, says his time on the farm prepared him well for the military.

"I was physically in a lot better shape than most people were when they went in," he says. "The physical part for me wasn't any big deal at all."

Above photos, from top: **David Colton, who served nearly 39 years in the military, now runs cattle near Malad.** Submitted photo; **Dan Elliott, right, shown here receiving an award from Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President Bryan Searle, served in the Air Force from 1962-1969 and now farms near Sandpoint.** Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo

Submitted photo

David Colton, shown here on his cow-calf operation near Malad, served in the U.S. military from 1972-2010.

During his military service, he got to work on the famous Air Force Thunderbird planes for a while "and that was really cool. It was a trip."

Elliott says military life and farming both have their stresses, but they are very different.

"Farming is a little bit of a gamble; you never know what Mother Nature is going to deal out to you," he says. "But it's a totally different set of things to worry about than when you're in the service. I'm not saying the stress isn't there, but it's not the same kind. At all."

Both Elliott and Colton are very proud of their time in the military.

"I am proud of my military service. I always have been," Elliott says. "It has its ups and downs with some of the things you go through, but that makes you more proud of it."

"I'm very proud of my service," says Colton, who is still a member of the Oneida County American Legion.

Idaho Farm Bureau President Bryan Searle, who farms near Shelley, says the Farm Bureau organization has always been extremely proud of the men and women who have served in the U.S. military.

He says this is one of the reasons Idaho Farm Bureau holds an annual Salute to Veterans event shortly before Veterans Day each year. This event draws hundreds of military veterans from the region to the Idaho Farm Bureau headquarters building in Pocatello, where they are honored and thanked for their service.

"Without veterans, I wouldn't be able to do what I love, which is farming," he says. "Whether you served one tour or for a career, Farm Bureau is deeply proud of you and we appreciate your service and thank you for it."

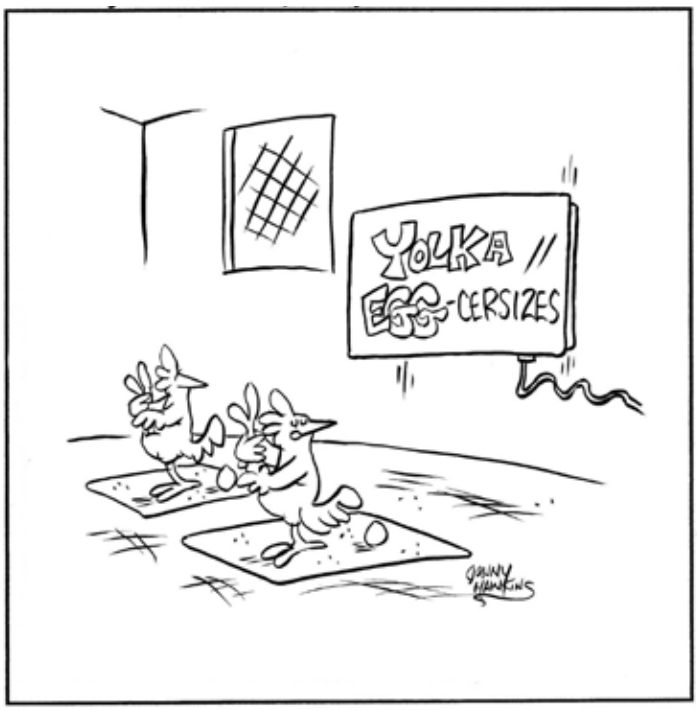
The average age of an Idaho farmer who is a military veteran is 66.1, according to the census of ag. That's quite a bit higher than the average age of 56.6 for all of Idaho's ag producers.

The ag census data also shows that the average size of farm owned by Idaho military veterans is 365 acres, as compared to the statewide average of 505 acres.

The data shows the average agricultural operation in Idaho owned by a military veteran brought in $353,000 in gross revenue in 2022, compared with the average of $476,000 for all farms and ranches in the state. ■

Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins



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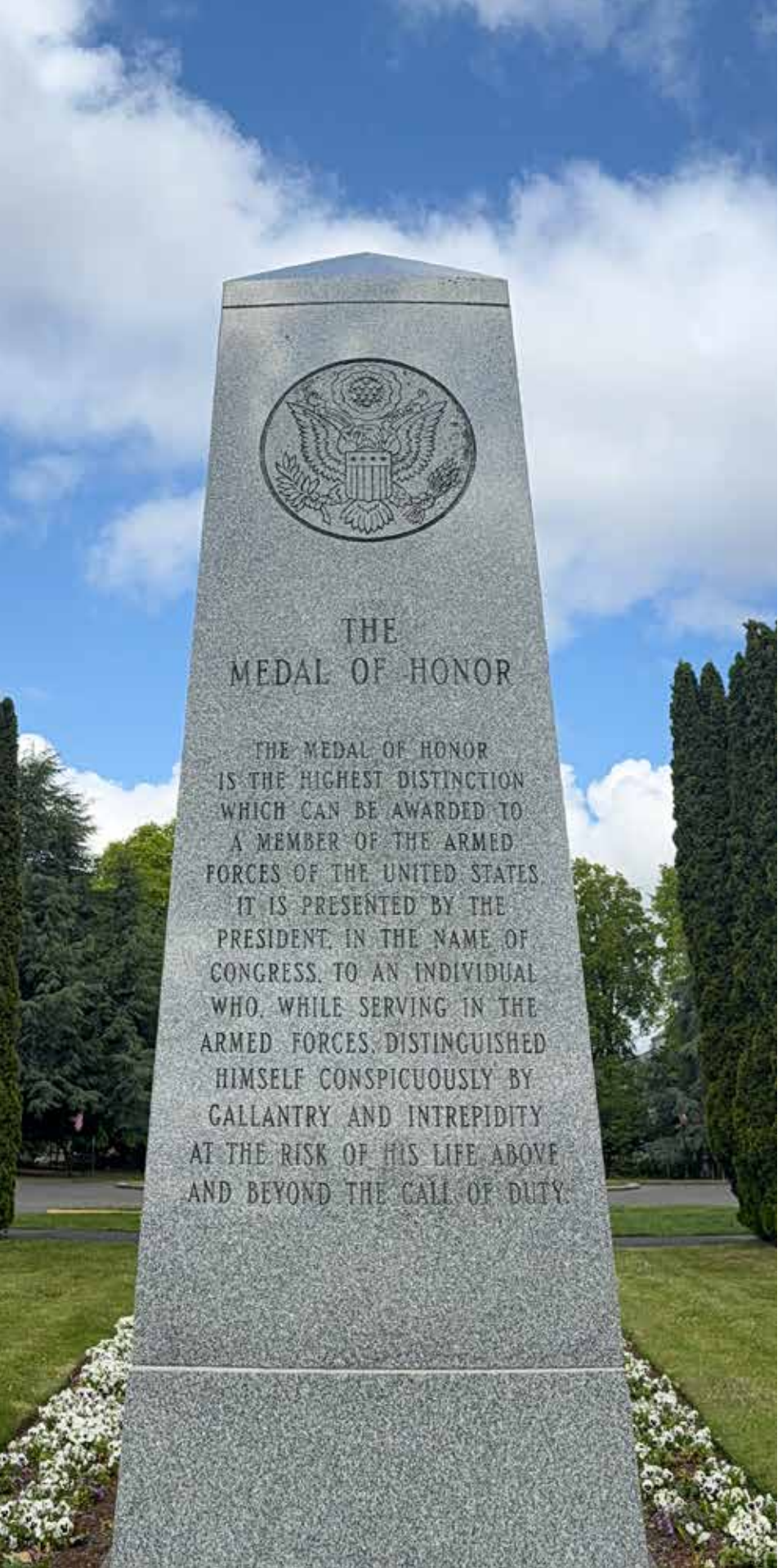


U.S. 20 is the National Medal of Honor Highway

By Bill Schaefer
For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Among veterans in the U.S. military, the Medal of Honor is recognized as the nation's highest honor awarded for military valor in action.

President Abraham Lincoln signed legislation establishing the award in 1861, eight months after the start of the Civil War, to recognize "non-commissioned officers and privates as shall most distinguish themselves by their gallantry in action and other soldier-like qualities…."

There have been 3,547 Medals of Honor awarded since the award's inception.

So, when Dick Tobiason called Miguel Dominic two years ago to help promote Tobiason's effort to have U.S. Highway 20 designated the "National Medal of Honor Highway," Dominic was all in.

Dominic served for almost 15 years in the U.S. Army and the National Guard and was awarded the Purple Heart in 2005 during a tour of duty in Iraq. Dominic currently is the resident historian at Veterans Memorial Building in Pocatello.

"I said, 'well, what do you need done?'" recounted Dominic. "And he says, 'we want to establish a National Medal of Honor Highway, and I'd like you to build a map.'"

Though the two men have never met, they have a shared commitment of military service, along with each one's individual Purple Heart award.

Tobiason had heard from Ned Barker, commander of the Idaho branch of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, that Dominic had the necessary graphic design skills to help get the project completed.

Running a length of 3,365 miles, U.S. 20 is the longest highway in the United States. Starting from Boston, Massachusetts, U.S. 20 winds its way through 12 states, terminating in Newport, Oregon.

Tobiason, of Bend, Oregon, had started the campaign years ago when he promised his

"I'm not a Medal of Honor recipient, but when they approached me about making that, it was a big satisfaction. I was adding to the history books something that they were doing for Medal of Honor recipients."

– Miguel Dominic

friend and fellow Bend resident Bob Maxwell, a World War II veteran, and Purple Heart and Medal of Honor recipient, to one day have U.S. 20 designated as the National Medal of Honor Highway.

Tobiason and Maxwell successfully lobbied the Oregon Legislature to designate U.S. 20 in Oregon as the Medal of Honor Highway In 2017. But Oregon is only one state and there would have to be another 11 states join Oregon's declaration for Tobiason's promise to begin to take shape.

Two years later, just before Maxwell died, Idaho followed Oregon's lead to become the second state to name U.S. 20 the Medal of Honor Highway, with assistance from Idaho veterans like Barker and Gayle Alvarez, who formerly served on the board of directors of the Idaho Military History Museum.

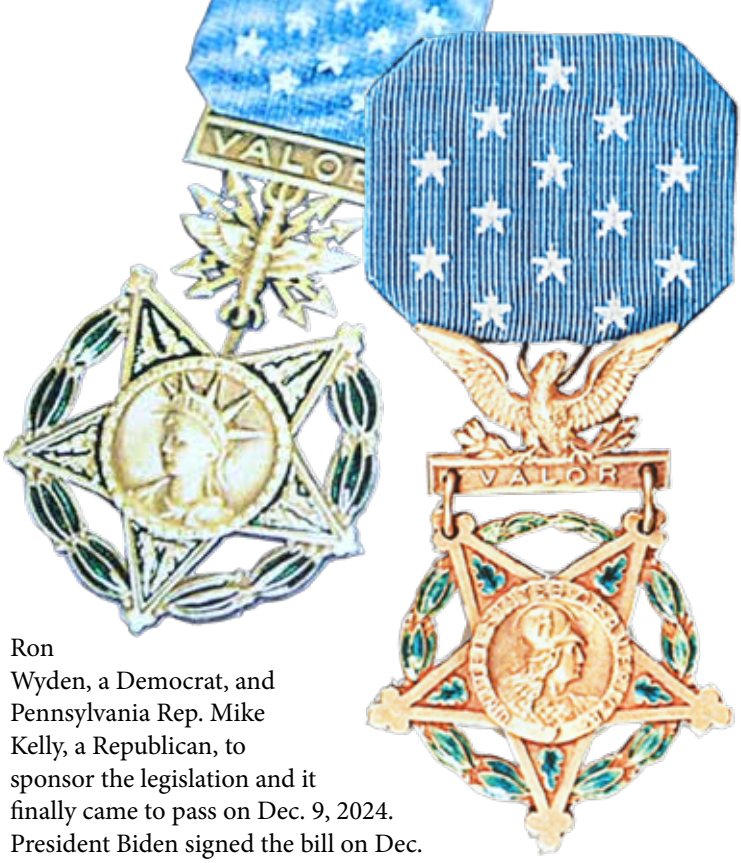
According to the Idaho Military History Museum, eight Medals of Honor were earned in Idaho, 18 Medal of Honor recipients are buried in Idaho, three Medal of Honor recipients are currently living in Idaho and four Medal of Honor recipients were born in Idaho.

Leaving Oregon, U.S. 20 crosses the Snake River and enters Idaho northwest of Parma. For 406.3 miles it runs southeast across Idaho and then heads north into Montana, 9.6 miles from the west entrance to Yellowstone National Park.

Ten other states have since designated U.S. 20 the Medal of Honor Highway.

With these states all on board, Tobiason said it was the right time to begin lobbying Congress to designate U.S. 20 the "National Medal of Honor Highway."

He worked with Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden, a Democrat, and Pennsylvania Rep. Mike Kelly, a Republican, to sponsor the legislation and it finally came to pass on Dec. 9, 2024. President Biden signed the bill on Dec. 17, 2024.



Tobiason recruited Dominic to help design graphic elements, such as the map to promote his efforts and lobby Congress.

Following passage of the federal legislation, Tobiason had one more job request for Dominic.

He wanted him to design a challenge coin to commemorate the occasion.

The origin of challenge coins is disputed but according to one story on a Department of Defense web page, challenge coins have been a part of American military history since World War I.

"Soldiers would carry these coins and trade them," Dominic said. "You would normally give it to another soldier and you're kind of awarding them for their service."

Dominic has designed two versions of a challenge coin commemorating the National Medal of Honor Highway.

The first coin was created to commemorate three Marine veterans that walked across U.S. 20 from Maine to Oregon.

The second challenge coin incorporates the 48-state continental map with the Medal of Honor Highway highlighted.

Dominic said it took him about a month to complete the coin's design and then they had to send it to the Congressional Medal of Honor Society for approval.

He said that seeing a map he had designed being used on the floor of the House of Representatives during debate for legislation designating U.S. Highway 20 as the National Medal of Honor Highway was a moment he'll never forget.

"I'm not a Medal of Honor recipient, but when they approached me about making that, it was a big satisfaction," he said. "I was adding to the history books something that they were doing for Medal of Honor recipients." ■

Photo by CB Creative

Raft River farmer Nate Garner and his family are shown here in one of their sugar beet fields. According to USDA data, family-owned farms continue to dominate the makeup of U.S. agriculture.

Small family farms, the roots of American agriculture

By Samantha Ayoub and Faith Parum
American Farm Bureau Federation Economists

When people are asked what a "small farm" is, they may base their answer on the number of acres or number of animals a farm has, and they often assume that there aren't many of them.

However, small, family-owned farms continue to dominate the makeup of American farms and ranches across the country.

USDA considers any place that has at least $1,000 of agricultural product sales as a farm. The Census of Agriculture reports 25% of farms with no sales in any year, and 30% with less than $10,000 in sales.

Regardless, these farms are important community members and may be contributing to the local food system.

With such variation in farm size and structure nationwide, USDA considers small farms as those with less than $350,000 of gross cash farm income (GCFI), regardless of whether the owner's primary job is farming.

It's important to note that GCFI, discussed in detail below, is not a measure of profit. Recent forecasts of net farm income show warning signs for farmers nationwide.

Crop receipts in 2025 are expected to decline while livestock gains only partly offset rising costs. For small farms that already operate on thin margins, these trends highlight just how challenging it can be to keep operations viable year after year.

By revenue

USDA classifies farm size based on GCFI, which includes sales of crops and livestock, payments made under federal agricultural programs, and other farm-related cash income including fees from production contracts.

Family farms are split into small, midsize, large and very large farms depending on how much GCFI they generate in a year. To be considered small, a farm must pull in less than $350,000 a year. More than 86% of the 1.9 million farms in the U.S. are considered small family farms based on this classification.

Small farms are further subdivided based on the primary farmer's job. The majority of farms earn income off the farm to support

farming activities – 77% of total U.S. farm household income came from off-farm jobs.

The largest category of farms in the U.S. are those small farms where the farmer's main job is not farming, making up 39% of farms.

The second-largest group of U.S. farms is considered "low-sales" farms. These are farms where the operator's main job is farming, but their farm brings in less than $150,000 of GCFI a year. This group includes more than 30% of all farms in the country.

And rather than making money, these families actually lose an average of $5,725 each year from farming after expenses, which average $28,550 per family farm.

When people hear that a "small" farm can have $350,000 in GCFI, it can sound like the farm family is taking home a big salary. But that number is not comparable to wages or salaries. It is simply the farm's total revenues before subtracting the massive expenses that come with producing food.

Seeds, feed, fuel, fertilizer, equipment, land payments, insurance and hired labor can easily run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, often leaving little to no profit.

USDA estimates that average production expenses in 2022 were $274,794 for small family farms with GCFI between $150,000 and $349,999. After expenses, these farms earn only $44,753 from farming on average.

The type of farming may in itself also impact how a farm is classified due to the value of the crop. Specialty crops are high value and require significant up-front investments in things like infrastructure or long-lasting plants, bushes or trees.

In 2023, the average specialty crop farm faced $466,400 in cash expenses, compared to $179,300 for the average U.S. farm. That means specialty crop growers carried expense levels about 160% higher than the typical farm.

As such, only 7% of specialty crops are grown by small farms (by this definition), both due to higher prices received and scale required to meet costs.

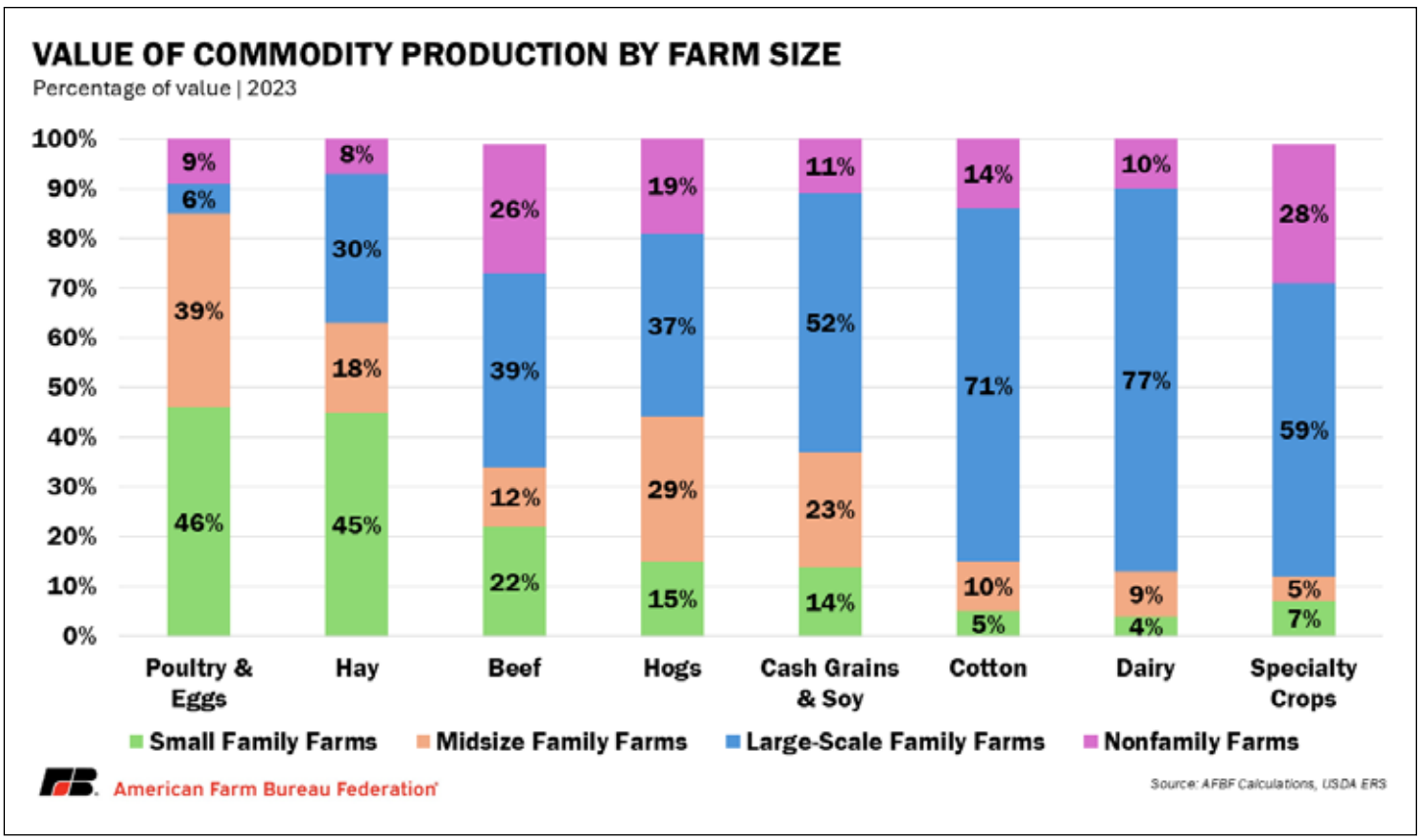
Cash grains and other row crops in the United States are also typically grown with highly technical equipment, so economies of scale again increase average farm size to cover the cost, pushing small farms to only 14% of cash grain and soybean production value.

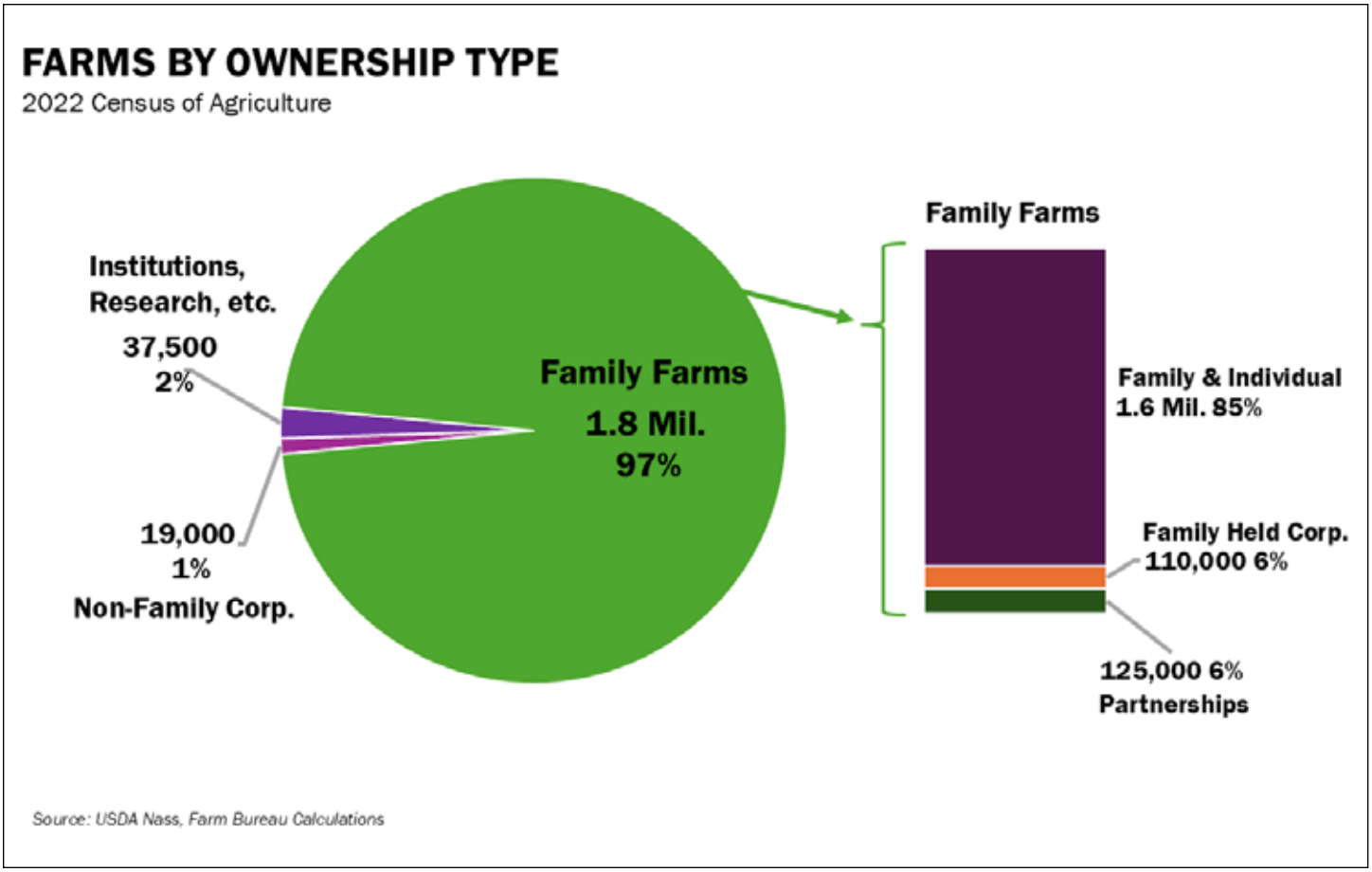
Farm ownership

Nearly 97% of American farms are owned by families. While it's often thought that large "corporate" farms are not family owned, less than 1% of all farms are non-family-owned corporations.

Families may choose to legally organize their businesses as corporations for tax purposes, and 6% of farms nationwide are corporations that are exclusively held by families, some of which are still small based off income or acreage.

Just because a farm is family owned, it does not mean that it is instantly small. Ten percent of farms are owned by families that generate more than $350,000 in farm revenues. However, small family farms still make up the majority of farms nationwide and operate a higher share of acres altogether than any other farm size.





By acreage

The average American farm was 466 acres in 2024, only 26 acres more than in the 1970s. When you examine the median size – where half of farms are larger and half are smaller, eradicating any skew from few very large or very small farms – the typical American farm was only 72 acres in the 2022 Census of Agriculture.

In fact, 42% of all farms are smaller than 50 acres. This wide gap between the average and median underscores how a relatively small number of very large farms pull up the average, while most farms operate on a much smaller scale.

Small farms may be ideal for livestock production, direct-to-consumer marketing or subsistence farming. Small farms contribute 46% of production value of poultry and eggs, which can be produced on smaller acreages and sold in local communities.

They also make up larger shares of production in hay and beef than other sectors, which may further reflect local market opportunities.

Conclusion

Small family farms remain the roots of American agriculture, not only because they represent the overwhelming majority of farm operations, but also because they embody the resilience and determination that keep rural communities thriving.

Farming at any size or scale is cost-intensive, yet rising input prices, thin margins, global competition and limited access to new technologies put significant pressure on small farms.

On top of these economic challenges, small farms often face the same regulatory requirements as larger operations, but without the scale to spread compliance costs across more acres. This helps explain why farms continue to grow in size as families expand to cover rising costs.

Small farms also sustain rural communities beyond the farm gate. Because they make up most U.S. farms and the farmers who run them often work off the farm, their households provide much of the population and workforce that keep schools, hospitals and local businesses open.

Without them, many rural communities would struggle to maintain the services that make them viable places to live and work.

While many families of all sizes rely on off-farm income to sustain their way of life, small farms' importance is undeniable as they face losses but continue to contribute to the food, fiber and fuel supply chain.

Continued recognition and support for farms of all size, but particularly those small family farms that define the American countryside, is critical to ensuring agriculture remains competitive and supports rural communities. ■

Idaho's per capita farm income lead grows

Photo by Sean Ellis

Wheat is harvested in a field near Ririe in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo. According to USDA data released Sept. 3, Idaho had a per capita farm income total of $5,804 in 2024.

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – That Idaho again led the West last year in total farm revenue on a per capita basis shouldn't be a big surprise. Idaho has had the top spot in that category for many years now.

But that Idaho's lead in per capita farm revenue is widening despite being one of the fastest-growing states in the nation is a bit surprising.

The per capita farm revenue number is derived by dividing a state's total farm revenue by its total population.

According to USDA data released Sept. 3, Idaho had a per capita farm income total of $5,804 in 2024. That is almost $200 per person more than last year's total of $5,617.

Among the 11 Western states, that put Idaho well ahead of No. 2 Montana, which came in at $4,332 in per capita farm income in 2024. Idaho's lead in per capita farm income over Montana grew, from $1,119 in 2023 to $1,472 in 2024.

"That we can maintain and even grow our lead in per capita farm income despite our rapid population growth is impressive," said University of Idaho Agricultural Economist Brett Wilder, who compiled the numbers.

"Idaho has agricultural producers who are good about adopting technological change and are leaders in the industry who are becoming even more efficient at producing more value per acre," he said. "That's one of the reasons we continue to raise that per capita farm income number."

The per capita farm income number is a simple way to show people, especially elected officials, how important agriculture is to the average person in Idaho compared to other states, Wilder said.

"It's important to remember that although Idaho has a relatively small economy, agriculture is a huge part of it and is important to everyone who lives in the state," he said.

The USDA data shows Idaho's 22,000-plus farmers and ranchers produced $11.79 billion in total farm revenue last year. Divided by the state's population of 2.03 million people, that worked out to $5,804 of farm revenue produced per every Idahoan.

The per capita number is derived from gross farm revenue and not net farm revenue, which is what the farmer actually gets after expenses are subtracted from revenue.

Idaho's per capita farm revenue number was $4,287 in 2017. Since that time, Idaho has had one of the fastest-growing populations in the nation.

The fact that Idaho's per capita farm income number continues to grow despite the state's rapid population increase shows that agriculture continues to grow in Idaho and is not stagnating at all, Wilder said.

At $3,595, Wyoming came in at No. 3 among the 11 Western states in per capita farm income in 2024.

New Mexico ranked fourth among those states in per capita farm income ($1,957), followed by Oregon ($1,653), Colorado ($1,598), Washington ($1,568), and California ($1,543).

Utah was next at $724, Arizona came in at $689 and Nevada was at $315.

When it came to total farm-gate revenue, California brought in $61 billion in 2024, making that state No. 1 in the nation in that category.

In the West, Washington was second in total farm-gate revenue with $12.6 billion in 2024, followed by Idaho with $11.8 billion.

Colorado was fourth in the West with $9.6 billion, and followed by Oregon ($7 billion), Arizona ($5.3 billion), Montana ($5 billion), New Mexico ($4.2 billion), Utah ($2.6 billion), Wyoming ($2.1 billion) and Nevada ($1 billion). ■

Chefs, media tour Idaho farm country

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Idaho chefs and media representatives spent a whole day traveling through the heart of southern Idaho's agricultural community, experiencing first-hand where their food really comes from and meeting some of the people who produce it.

The Sept. 8 Harvest Tour that gave them this experience was held by Idaho State Department of Agriculture's Idaho Preferred program.

"Agriculture touches so many areas of daily life in Idaho, and we are excited to show off the bounty of our local harvest season with a special tour through the heart of southwestern Idaho's agricultural community," said Idaho Preferred Program Manager Erica White.

She said one of the main goals of the tour is to create awareness of all the ways agriculture influences daily life in Idaho and demonstrate why harvest season is so important to the state's local communities and economy.

The bus tour, which included a mix of media and culinary professionals, made its way from Boise to the Magic Valley area.

The bus took tour participants past corn fields, freshly cut hay and bean fields, and sugar beet fields a month or so away from harvest. It also passed a potato field, a few dairies and lots of smaller cattle ranches.

Idaho has about 22,000 farms and ranches that produce more than 180 agricultural commodities, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

White told participants Idaho Preferred wanted to help "you understand the amazing agricultural diversity and bounty we have in this state."

The Harvest Tour in past years has focused on the Treasure Valley of southcentral Idaho. This year's tour took participants to the Magic Valley of southcentral Idaho.

"Today, (the Magic Valley is) one of the most productive agricultural regions in the country," said White.

The first stop was at G+ Ranches in Buhl, where participants were given a tour of the ranch by owner Celia Gould, the former director of ISDA

Gould provided an abbreviated history of the ranch and Magic Valley and explained how previous Idahoans turned sage brush into farmland. Tour participants were allowed to get close to some of the ranch's cattle grazing lazily in a lush pasture.

"You can get closer," Gould told some people who were hesitant to get within about 50 yards of the mellow cattle.

Though the beef cattle market is up and it's a great time to be in the cow-calf industry right now, it's also a tough life with daily challenges and ranchers have been on the "other side" of the market, she said.

However, Gould, with two young grandchildren at her side, added, "I wouldn't trade it for any other life; it's the best life

LEFT: **Cloverleaf Creamery owners Bill and Donna Stoltzfus tell Harvest Tour participants a little about the family-run operation headquartered in Buhl; A**BOVE: **Harvest Tour participants learn about G+Ranches during a stop in Buhl. The bus tour was sponsored by Idaho State Department of Agriculture's Idaho Preferred program as a way for chefs and media to get a close-up look at Idaho's agricultural industry.** Photos by Sean Ellis

"It's so easy to spend most of your time in the kitchen or running a business and making money rather than paying attention to where the food is coming from and all the different steps that go into it before it comes to us."

– Annelies Knapp, chef, Funky Taco

I can hope for … I'm generation three on the ranch and the most important crop we grow here is the next generation."

Stop two was at 1000 Springs Mill, a certified organic milling facility in Buhl. The mill contracts with farmers to grow a variety of organic crops, including ancient grains, popcorn, quinoa and kidney beans.

It also produces specialty products such as a high-protein, gluten-free pancake mix.

Participants toured the 240,000-square-foot facility, guided by owner Tim Cornie. "We have a lot of room to grow," he said.

The next stop was at Riverence, one of the largest food trout producers in the world. Idaho leads the nation in trout production and most of that industry is centered around Buhl.

"Welcome to trout central," Riverence's Todd English told participants. "This is the trout capital of the world."

He said the region is a great place to produce trout because of the spring water that comes out of the ground at 58 degrees year-round.

"The water is why we are here," he said. "This is the most incredible spring water you have ever seen. It's the ideal temperature for growing trout here."

Riverence is a vertically integrated company that produces 27 million pounds of rainbow trout each year.

"We manage everything here, from egg to distribution," English said.

Stop four was Cloverleaf Creamery, a family-owned business headquartered in Buhl that produces and bottles its own milk and makes its own ice cream, yogurt and other milk products.

The creamery is owned by Bill and Donna Stoltzfus. Donna said the thing that makes the business unique is that they keep everything local, from cow to bottle.

Bill said most of the creamery's advertising is done by its customers. He said the operation's mission statement when it began was simple: "Make the best possible product and our customers will sell it for us. And that's literally what's happened."

The last stop was Kelley's Canyon Orchard in Filer, which produces a wide variety of fruit and flowers.

The orchard sells to schools and at the Boise Farmers Market and also does a U-pick operation.

Owner Robin Kelley credited the Idaho Preferred program with helping her get the word out about the farm.

"Idaho Preferred does a very good job of supporting local, small agricultural operations," she said. "We are one of those operations."

The program "can connect you to anybody who grows anything in the state and show you how to get it," she added.

One of the main purposes of the tour was to show culinary professionals how Idaho Preferred can connect them directly to farmers and ranchers, White said.

"We are here to help farmers and ranchers tell their stories," she said. "We want to be a bridge to the community.

Annelies Knapp, a chef at Funky Taco in Boise, said she joined the tour "basically to learn more about where our food is coming from and connect with farmers. It's so easy to spend most of your time in the kitchen or running a business and making money rather than paying attention to where the food is coming from and all the different steps that go into it before it comes to us."

She was part of a sizable contingent from Funky Taco that joined the tour.

"It's a very unique experience that we probably wouldn't have had if we didn't come on the tour today," Knapp said. ■

RIGHT: **Tour participants also visited Kelley's Canyon Orchard in Filer.**

Governor Little Leads Idaho Trade Mission to the United Kingdom

In September, Governor Brad Little lead a diplomatic trade mission to the United Kingdom, making Idaho the first state to send an official delegation following the Trump Administration's recent visit to UK.

The Idaho Department of Commerce, the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA), and select industry representatives joined the governor to strengthen ties with UK officials and identify new opportunities for Idaho companies abroad.

"Idaho is home to world leaders in agriculture and technology, and this mission was an important opportunity to share that story with leaders in the United Kingdom," Governor Little said. "This mission follows the Trump Administration's recent visit to the United Kingdom and the work they began to strengthen U.S.-UK ties, and Idaho is proud to continue that effort. We are committed to developing long-term partnerships that create new opportunities for our companies and strengthen connections between Idaho and the UK."

Governor Little, Director Tewalt and Jay Theiler meet with The Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town.

Agriculture remains central to Idaho's economy, with $2.6 billion in food and agriculture exports in 2023. In 2024, exports to the UK totaled $2.97 million, nearly 70 percent of which were prepared potatoes. Officials see strong potential for Idaho beef, dairy, and processed potatoes in the UK market, which is the world's largest importer of cheese.

The mission also explored opportunities beyond agriculture, including collaboration in financial technology and advanced nuclear energy, following the Trump Administration's Technology Prosperity Deal.

Throughout the trade mission, the delegation met with the International Meat Trade Association and the UK Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to discuss global market balance, tariffs and pest management. The delegation also met with David Barton, chair of the UK National Farmers Union Livestock Board to discuss the real world challenges that are true for both UK and Idaho beef producers.

"This is an important time for Idaho agriculture to refocus efforts on diversifying markets," said Chanel Tewalt, ISDA Director. "We are grateful for the strong partnerships we have built, and it is incumbent upon us to always be looking for the next trade opportunity."

By fostering new relationships in the UK, Idaho is working to diversify export destinations, expand its international presence, and create new opportunities for the state's farmers, ranchers, and food processors.

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When pine tops turn brown: Spotting the Ips beetle in Idaho

By Randy Brooks
University of Idaho

As I was traveling across Idaho this summer and fall, I noticed a lot of pine tops turning reddish-brown, especially north of the Boise area going toward Stanley and McCall. This is due to the Ips pini beetle, often called the pine engraver.

This bark beetle is native to Idaho and one of the most common causes of pine top-kill and dieback across the state, especially after dry summers, thinning projects, or storm damage.

LEFT: **Red tops in pines indicate Ips pini top kill.** Photo by Randy Brooks; ABOVE: **Ips pini can also kill groups of smaller, stressed trees as seen here in the Coeur d'Alene area.** Photo by Tom Eckberg

Knowing how it lives, what attracts it, and how to manage it can help keep your pines healthy and resilient.

The pine engraver is a small, reddish-brown beetle about the size of a grain of rice. Despite its size, it can have an enormous impact on stressed pine trees. It gets its name from the engraved galleries it chews beneath the bark, patterns that look like tiny etchings in the inner wood.

Problems with this pest arise when conditions favor population explosions such as plenty of freshly cut pine slash, drought-weakened trees, or crowded stands. Under those conditions, Ips pini can move from dead trees into living pines, killing tops, limbs, or even whole trees.

Ips pini prefers pines (lodgepole, ponderosa, western white pine, and ornamentals such as Scotch and Austrian pine), with pretty much every pine species in Idaho susceptible.

The beetle is most often found in rural properties, woodlots, and pastures where pines provide shade or shelter. Landowners often first notice it in windbreaks where trees are stressed by drought, soil compaction, or age.

Understanding the beetle's life cycle is key to managing it effectively. Adult beetles overwinter beneath the bark of dead trees or in woody debris. As soon as spring temperatures get above 50 degrees, they begin to fly.

Males bore into the bark of weakened trees or fresh slash and release pheromones that attract females. Within days, small swarms gather. Females carve shallow tunnels, called galleries, just under the bark where they deposit eggs.

Larvae hatch within a week or two and begin chewing outward through the cambium, creating distinctive H-shaped patterns under the bark. These galleries girdle the tree, which cuts off the nutrient pathways, causing the upper crown to brown and die.

Each generation takes roughly five to seven weeks, and in Idaho, the Ips pini can complete two to four generations per year depending on temperature and elevation. That means infestations can build rapidly from early spring through late summer.

Many Idaho landowners first notice damage in June through August. Look for these clues:

- Top browning or "flagging." The top 2–6 feet of the tree turns reddish-brown while lower branches stay green.
- Fine sawdust (frass). Found at the base of the tree or in bark crevices.
- Pitch tubes. Small, popcorn-like blobs of resin where beetles bored through the bark.
- H-shaped galleries. Visible under the bark if you peel it back; these confirm Ips activity.
- Scattered tree death. Usually a few trees at first, spreading outward if unmanaged.

Unlike the mountain pine beetle, which typically kills entire mature trees, Ips pini often kills only the tops or smaller-diameter trees first but can spread out from there. Ips pini beetles thrive when trees are weakened or recently disturbed.

Common Idaho outbreak triggers include:

- Drought. Dry summers reduce tree sap flow, leaving less pitch to resist beetles.
- Spring thinning or logging. Freshly cut slash provides ideal breeding habitat.
- Storm breakage or snow damage. Downed limbs and tops attract beetles.
- Crowded stands. Pines growing too close compete for light and water, lowering resistance.

Once Ips pini finds a good food source, it releases aggregation pheromones that draw in hundreds of others. A single infested log or slash pile can produce thousands of new beetles in one season.

Practical management for Idaho landowners

Avoid cutting or piling pine slash between February and July, when beetles are flying. If thinning is needed in spring, chip, burn, or remove material within two weeks so it doesn't become breeding habitat. Late-summer or fall thinning (August–October) is safest.

Healthy pines can "pitch" out beetles with resin. During extended dry periods, deep-water windbreak and yard trees every few weeks. Mulching and reducing soil compaction near roots also helps.

After windthrow or firewood cutting, remove or burn infested wood before beetles complete their cycle (usually by June). Leaving it over summer gives them time to multiply and spread.

Reduce overcrowding so trees receive adequate light and moisture. When pruning, avoid heavy topping or bark wounding — beetles are drawn to fresh injuries.

Inspect susceptible trees each spring and early summer. Look for frass or crown discoloration. Early detection allows removal of only a few affected trees instead of losing a whole stand.

Beetles can emerge from stored firewood for several months after cutting. Keep pine firewood piles away from live trees (at least 50 feet if possible) and cover or debark them to reduce risk. Never stack freshly cut pine next to standing trees during spring and summer.

If you notice widespread top dieback or entire trees fading on your property, contact the Idaho Department of Lands, the University of Idaho Extension Forestry, or local consulting foresters or certified arborists. These professionals can help confirm the species, determine if the infestation is active, and recommend appropriate sanitation or salvage options.

Remember, the Ips pini is not an invader, it's a native Idaho beetle that becomes a pest when trees are stressed. Good management, especially proper timing of cutting, careful slash disposal, and maintaining healthy trees, keeps this beetle in balance.

Left unchecked, though, populations can flare up quickly and damage trees in a single season. With awareness and preventive care, Idaho landowners can keep their pine trees thriving and their landscapes healthy for decades to come. And lastly, if unsure what your trees are, pines have needles in packs! ■

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

Idaho programs help producers with livestock depredation

Governor's Office of Species Conservation Press Release

Livestock mortalities caused by wolves and grizzly bears can have a significant impact on individual producers in certain areas. To help offset or minimize this, the state of Idaho has two programs to help producers.

The Office of Species Conservation (OSC) is accepting compensation claims from Idaho producers for wolf and grizzly bear depredation. There is financial assistance available to livestock producers for confirmed, probable, and possible kills and injuries due to wolves and grizzly bears during the 2025 calendar year.

The U.S. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's Wildlife Services conducts the initial investigation. Producers can appeal that ruling to the Idaho Depredating Wildlife Appeals Board by contacting the Idaho State Department of Agriculture.

OSC has received grant funding through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Wolf Livestock Loss Demonstration Project Grant Program and state funding from Idaho House Bill 592 (2024) to compensate producers.

The compensation rates are based on the yearly average market rate for livestock based on information gathered from Idaho livestock producer organizations and national data. The compensation claims deadline is Dec. 31, 2025. For additional information or to receive claim forms, please contact Joshua Uriarte at (208) 332-1556 or joshua.uriarte@osc.idaho.gov.

Prevention Program

OSC submitted a grant application to the FWS wolf loss grant program in the spring and is awaiting results. OSC expects to hear something by the end of the year. This funding assists producers with implementation of wolf conflict prevention activities.

The Prevention Program recognizes that each livestock operation is different with its own unique set of challenges. As a result, some methods will be better suited for certain operations than others and, in some cases, a combination of techniques and methods may be needed to achieve success. Several producers have been incorporating trail cameras and range riders into their management.

OSC also has $75,000 available annually from House Bill 592 for wolf and grizzly bear conflict prevention. This funding is available to assist with proven prevention measures such as electric fencing to reduce grizzly bear conflicts, range riding, livestock guard dogs, and guard dog food.

Each project will be assessed on a case-by-case basis to determine the best available conflict prevention techniques from each producer's individual situation. Applications for both wolf and grizzly bear conflict prevention are due to OSC by Feb. 15, 2026.

Photo by Jim Parker

The state of Idaho has two programs to help offset or minimize the impact wolves and grizzly bears have on producers.

OSC, in collaboration with interested livestock producers, the Idaho Cattlemen's Association, Idaho Wool Growers Association, U.S. Wildlife Services, and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, will help producers implement the following methods on a case-by-case basis in the hopes of decreasing the likelihood of wolf-livestock conflict: guard dogs, range riders, scare devices, including fladry and fox lights, trail cameras, temporary fencing, pens and sheds, electric fencing, guard dog food and other proven techniques.

For additional information on either prevention program and to receive application forms, contact Austin Terrell at (208) 571-2052 or austin.terrell@osc.idaho.gov. ■

Episode 91 - Oasis Camel Dairy

Nancy Riegler loves and lives with camels. She runs the Oasis Camel Dairy Farm in Ramona, California, with her husband Gil. Her stories of meeting Gil, discovering camels, learning how to milk camels, and many other antics are told in this interview. You won't want to miss this hilarious episode that had us laughing from start to finish.

2025 is a challenging year for farmers

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – This is shaping up to be a challenging year for most agricultural commodities in the United States. Except cattle and calves.

The cattle and calves sector is one of the only ag commodity sectors that is doing well in 2025, according to USDA data released Sept. 3. The data from USDA's Economic Research Service shows U.S. farm cash receipts – this is the money that farmers and ranchers receive directly for their commodity – will be up a total of 5 percent in 2025.

The report – "Farm Income and Financial Forecasts for 2025" – also projects that total net farm income will increase by 40 percent in 2025, compared to 2024. Net farm income is a broad measure of profits.

But that is misleading. The bulk of the increase, both in farm cash receipts and net farm income, is expected to come from the cattle and calves sector, which has been on a roll for a couple of years now.

According to the report, cash receipts from the cattle and calves sector are expected to increase by 13 percent this year relative to last year.

That's one of the few pieces of good news contained in the report.

Cassia County rancher Paul Marchant said the cattle industry has enjoyed a good run recently, but it's not by accident.

"Those in the beef industry are experiencing historically high prices; things that most could never have envisioned," he told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation. "At the same time, however, the industry and its producers are still playing catch-up for years and decades of being price takers for a grossly under-valued product."

Marchant said a "byproduct of both the good and hard times is an industry that has learned to adapt to demands of complementing and competing industry segments and consumer preferences."

"Advancements in technological processes have been matched, if not exceeded by, increased efficiency in feeding, marketing and genetics," he said. "All of these things have come together to aid the cow-calf and feeding sectors in producing more beef, with fewer cattle, than at any other time in history. In all of agriculture, there's not a brighter example of creating more with less, all while enhancing product quality, than the American beef industry of the past decade."

Cattle and calves is Idaho's No. 2 agricultural commodity in terms of total farm cash receipts, behind the milk sector, which is forecast to see a 4 percent drop in cash receipts this year.

This is the forecast nationally, but it may or may not happen in Idaho, which ranks No. 3 in the nation in milk production.

Idaho Dairymen's Association Executive Director Rick Naerebout said Idaho milk production was up 7 percent during the first half of the year.

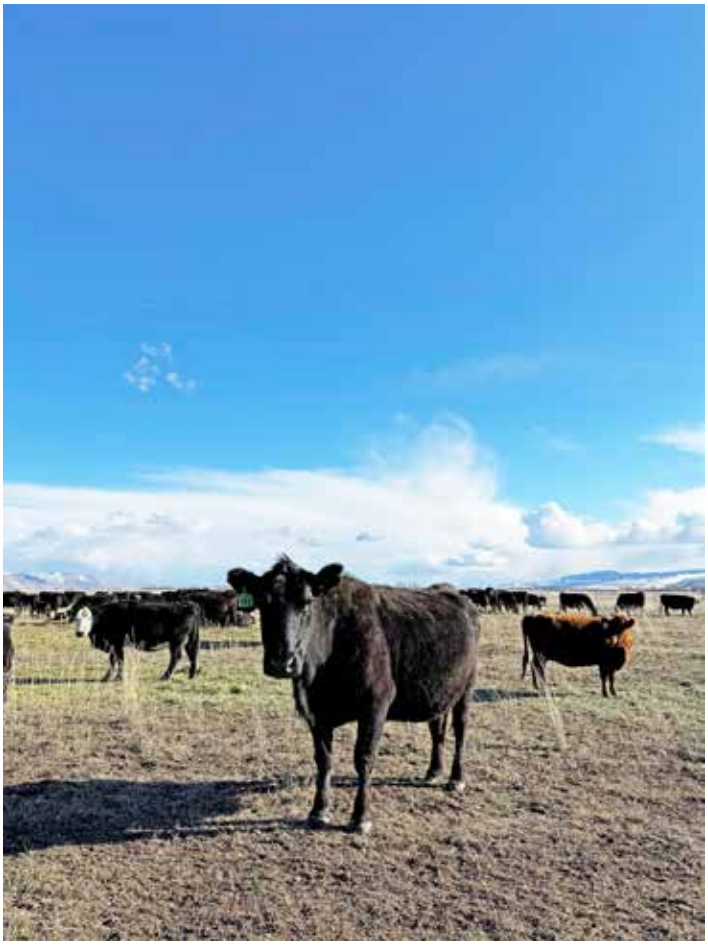

Photo by Jim Parker

USDA expects most agricultural commodities to experience a decline in total farm cash receipts this year, with the exception of cattle and calves, which is Idaho's No. 2 ag commodity in terms of total farm-gate revenue.

"Our guys are cranking out milk right now," he said.

Farm-level milk prices may be down slightly from last year, "but it's still been a good year so far," Naerebout said. "It's not a record year, but it's not a bad year either."

Milk is Idaho's top agricultural commodity with $3.87 billion in cash receipts in 2024, according to the USDA report. Cattle in calves came in at No. 2 in that category with $3.3 billion.

The U.S. vegetable sector, which includes potatoes, Idaho's No. 3 ag commodity, is expected to experience a 5 percent drop in revenue in 2025.

Wheat, which ranks No. 4 in Idaho in total farm cash receipts, is forecast to see a 12 percent drop in revenue, and cash receipts for hay, which ranked No. 6 among Idaho farm commodities last year, are forecast to be down 3 percent.

Other major ag commodities in Idaho that are expected to see declines in cash receipts include barley and corn.

Chicken eggs over the past few years have become a major

Idaho ag commodity in terms of cash receipts and USDA forecasts revenue from that commodity will increase by 32 percent this year.

USDA forecasts farm-level income from fruits and nuts will be up 4 percent in 2025. Farmers in southwestern Idaho do produce a decent amount of fruit such as apples and peaches.

The net farm income total is expected to be boosted by a large increase in total direct government payments to farmers and ranchers. While still a small percentage of overall farm income, total government payments to U.S. farmers are forecast to increase from $10 billion in 2024 to $40 billion in 2025.

In addition to declining farm-gate revenue this year, farmers also have to contend with another increase in overall expenses. USDA forecasts total U.S. farm and ranch production expenses will be up 3 percent, or $12 billion, compared with 2024.

Overall U.S. farm production expenses are forecast to total $457 billion in 2025.

Some expenses, such as labor, interest and property taxes, are forecast to be up between 4 and 5 percent, while livestock and poultry purchases are expected to be up 22 percent, according to USDA. Expenses that are forecast to be down include feed (down 6 percent), fertilizer (-1 percent), seeds (-1 percent), pesticides (-5 percent) and fuel (-4 percent).

According to the report, "Spending on livestock/poultry purchases are expected to see the largest increase relative to 2025 … while spending on feed is expected to decline in 2025."

"When adjusted for inflation, the expenses are projected to be comparable to their 2024 levels," the report states.

Total U.S. farm cash receipts in 2025 are forecast to rise by $24 billion to $535 billion, a 5 percent increase relative to 2024.

USDA forecasts that total U.S. crop receipts will fall by $6 billion, or 2.5 percent, from 2024, while total receipts from animals and animal products will increase by $30 billion (11 percent).

"Milk was an exception, with lower cash receipts," the report states. ■

Photo by Sean Ellis

A corn field near Middleton is irrigated earlier this year. USDA expects most agricultural commodities, including corn, will experience a decline in total farm cash receipts this year, with the exception of cattle and calves, which is Idaho's No. 2 ag commodity in terms of total farm-gate revenue.

Photo by John O'Connell

From left, Rebekah Dahlin, a University of Idaho Extension administrative specialist; Caroline Grist, Hailey Elementary School's engineering and design teacher; Shawn Schumacher, Hailey Elementary School's art teacher; Hailey Elementary School Principal Stephanie Wallace; and UI Extension educator Grant Loomis, Blaine County; pose inside of a geodesic dome greenhouse they all played a role in building for the school.

UI Extension donates greenhouse to Hailey school

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

MOSCOW, Idaho – Hailey Elementary School teacher Shawn Schumacher couldn't contain her enthusiasm last spring after reading an email from University of Idaho Extension on her lunchbreak.

"They're going to give us a greenhouse!" Schumacher shouted as she ran down the hall toward her colleague, Caroline Grist.

Grant Loomis, a UI Extension educator in Blaine County, is preparing to launch a program that will teach participants in the Wood River Valley how to build their own geodesic dome greenhouse from scratch.

To test the design, he made a trial greenhouse during the summer and chose to donate it to Hailey Elementary, which plans to use it as a resource for teaching science, engineering and art, as well as for Schumacher's informal student garden club.

The first dome was funded with a $3,000 UI Extension Innovative Projects grant, also benefiting from donated supplies from area businesses and labor from the county Extension team and school volunteers.

Participants in Loomis's future greenhouse-building classes will be asked to cover their own supplies and tools.

"I just feel like locally in Blaine County there's a lot of interest in home production and self-resilience," Loomis said. "I could see this class starting here and maybe becoming a statewide program through which we host classes in different counties."

Inspiration for the project

Loomis got the idea for the program from a presentation University of Wyoming Extension educator Jeff Edwards made during a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education conference hosted in Salt Lake City during the fall of 2024.

Edwards provided Loomis with a geodesic dome greenhouse construction manual, including tools needed, specifications for machining parts, a website for buying specialized vents and precise quantities of plywood, lumber and polyplastic layer to order.

"It really resonated with my interests," said Loomis, who made minor adjustments to the plans based on local availability of materials. "It turned out a lot bigger and better looking than I initially envisioned. It's a real eye-catcher."

The dome design has proven capable of withstanding harsh southeast Wyoming winters, as snow slides off the roof rather than accumulating. The vents are equipped with gas chambers that trigger louvers, or slats, to open when the ambient temperature reaches a certain threshold.

Loomis anticipates greenhouse-building classes will commence in 2027, with no more than 10 students per cohort. Instruction will likely be offered at a chosen participant's property, where a single greenhouse will be built as an example for others in the class to follow.

Community showpiece

Rebekah Dahlin, an Extension administrative specialist who helped with greenhouse construction and coordinating plans with the elementary school, believes the dome outside of Hailey Elementary will serve as a showpiece to spur interest in future greenhouse construction classes.

"I've already had people reaching out to me like, 'Hey, I saw what you guys did there,'" Dahlin said. "I think that's part of Extension, too, is getting to work with constituents in your community and making something like that come to fruition."

School garden

Schumacher, who is the elementary school's art teacher, created a 3,000-square-foot garden on school grounds in 2022.

Many students interested in horticulture spend their recesses planting, raising and tending to a variety of flowers, herbs and produce, available for school staff and the public to pick.

"I think kids need to get dirty," Schumacher said. "We've moved away from that, and gardening is a great way to get them dirty."

Schumacher also routinely convenes art classes in the school garden, where students can draw or paint plants in detail.

Grist, who is the school's engineering and design teacher, assigned her students to build wooden planter boxes to place inside the greenhouse. They'll be filled with compost and drip irrigated.

"The greenhouse itself, along with the boxes, was a great opportunity for problem solving," Grist said. "They had to do the math to figure out how big the boxes should be and how much materials we needed."

The greenhouse should extend the gardening season by a couple of weeks both at the beginning and end of the season. The school also has plans to use the structure for outdoor classes when the weather turns cold. ■

Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins

"That one looks like me, too."

"Let me show you my grandkids' Grand Champions!"


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