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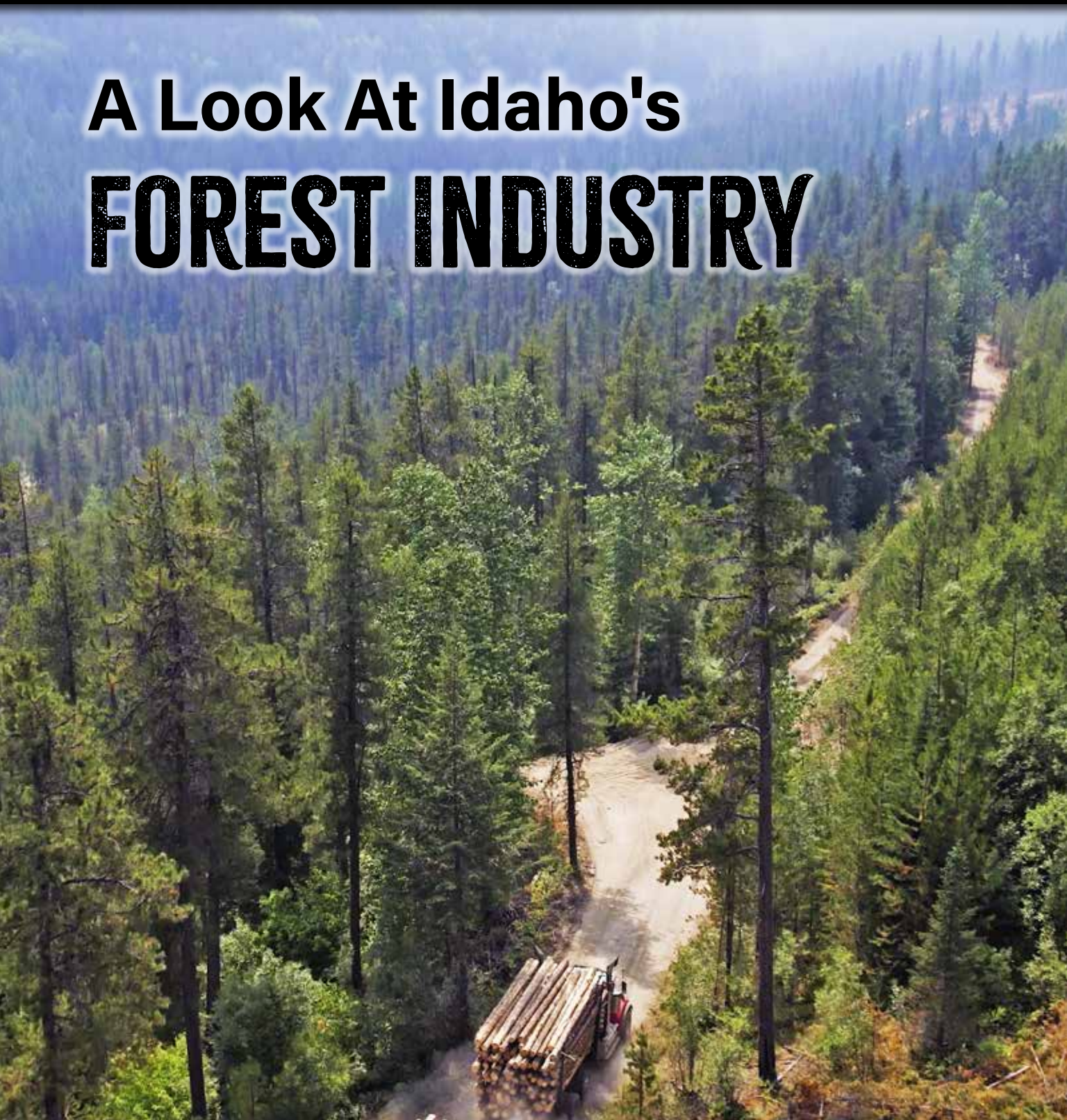
A Look At Idaho's FOREST INDUSTRY



The Zipline

By Zippy Duvall
President, American Farm Bureau Federation

Celebrating America's farm dogs

Farm dogs play a special role on farms and ranches across the country. These animals are more than beloved pets for farm families.

Farm dogs take on important jobs, pitching in and lifting spirits. That's why Farm Bureau is a proud partner with Nestlé Purina PetCare on the Farm Dog of the Year contest for the eighth year in a row.

This contest has become a highlight of the AFBF convention every year, and for good reason. This is a chance for us to celebrate our four-legged friends who show up, day in and day out, tails wagging and eager to help.

From rounding up and protecting livestock to opening gates and chasing off pests, there's a broad range of jobs which farmers and ranchers rely on their trusted dogs for.

Some dogs are even trained to sniff out crop diseases. Dogs like my red heeler, Ziggy, can also serve as the welcoming committee to the farm.

See **DUVALL,** page 6

The President's Desk

By Bryan Searle
President, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Idaho's forest industry is a big part of the state

Agriculture is widely considered the mainstay of Idaho's economy and way of life. That is an accurate take, and it doesn't even consider the state's vast amount of forestland.

Maybe it should.

There are 11.5 million acres of land in farming in Idaho, according to the latest Census of Agriculture. That includes almost 6 million acres of crop land.

That's impressive. Now consider: There are 21.5 million acres of forestland in Idaho. That's also impressive.

According to the Idaho Forest Products Commission, the state's timber industry contributes about $2.8 billion to Idaho's gross state product each year and is responsible for about 31,000 jobs.

Through the sale of endowment land timber, Idaho's forest industry also provides more than $62 million each year to the state's public schools.

See **SEARLE,** page 7

Inside Farm Bureau

By Zak Miller
CEO, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Make forests healthy again

The Greek philosopher Aristotle, writing over 2,300 years ago, observed that "Nature abhors a vacuum."

As a Westerner who has interacted with federal lands throughout my life, I've witnessed this principle. When management is absent, nature steps in with its solutions, often with devastating consequences.

"Millions of acres of national forests in Idaho have remained untouched for too long, creating a tinderbox of fuel that threatens communities, air quality, and the environment," Gov. Brad Little noted in his April "State of Idaho's Forests" report.

It is frustrating to witness lumber being sourced from foreign countries while our forests become overcrowded, diseased, and increasingly prone to devastating summer wildfires. The economic impact of these wildfires extends beyond lost timber resources; it affects our communities, air quality, and natural ecosystems.

See **MILLER,** page 6

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COVER: Idaho's forests are a major part of the state's economy and way of life. See page 10 for a story on the state's timber industry. Photo by Jacob Christensen

Submitted photo

The Japanese beetle, shown here, can attack a wide variety of crops and plants. The Idaho State Department of Agriculture is constantly on the lookout for the invasive pest in Idaho.

Ag department wages war on invasive beetle

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – It may seem at times that the Idaho ag department is playing whack-a-mole with the Japanese beetle.

The beetle, a non-native invasive pest that attacks a wide variety of crops, has popped up in various spots in Idaho over the years.

Because it is a major threat to the state's agricultural industry, the Idaho State Department of Agriculture surveys for the pest and whacks it down when it appears.

"We've been on a mission, if you will, for a couple of decades now to be on the lookout to make sure it does not make its way to becoming part of Idaho and another insect our growers have to fight with," says Andrea Thompson, section manager of ISDA's plant industries division.

The beetle is a highly destructive plant pest that feeds on more than 300 different agricultural and ornamental plants.

According to a recent University of Idaho study, agriculture accounts for one in every nine jobs in the state, 17% of total sales and 13% of total gross state product.

The ISDA has chased the pest wherever it pops up in Idaho and ensured it doesn't gain a permanent presence here.

"We are kind of on the chase just trying to make sure that this pest that obviously can find a way to make it here doesn't get a foothold in Idaho," Thompson says.

See **BEETLE,** page 9

Edgar returns to Idaho as new ag college dean

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

MOSCOW, Idaho – Soon – June 23 to be exact – Leslie Edgar will take over as the new dean of University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life sciences.

Edgar, who was named the new CALS dean on March 31, currently serves as the associate dean of research for Washinton State University's College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences and as director of the Agricultural Research Center.

Current CALS Dean Michael Parrella announced his upcoming retirement late last summer to give the university plenty of time to find his replacement.

Since being named as the new CALS dean, Edgar, who still resided in Washington as this magazine went to print, has been in communication with Parrella, learning as much as she can from him so she can hit the ground running.

One of the first things on her agenda is to meet with leaders of many of Idaho's farm and ranch groups and commissions.

Edgar said one of the things she really appreciates about Parrella is the tremendous support he created from stakeholders such as ag groups and she wants to continue that.

"Her passion for agriculture and our great state gives me great hope that she will be able to lead CALS with vision and purpose."

– Zak Miller, IDFB CEO

"I hope to hit the ground running June 23 and visit with as many commodity groups as I can, as well as visit as much of the state as I can, this summer," she told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation.

"Where dean Parrella left the college, it's in really good shape," Edgar added. "I feel blessed to be the next dean … I feel confident I can step in and work with the faculty, staff, students and stakeholders to move the college forward."

She said it's a little early to talk about specific goals, but one of her main objectives is to ensure the ag college continues to be an engine of innovation for agriculture in the state.

Parrella served as CALS dean for nine years and will step aside, into retirement, as Edgar takes the helm.

Parrella is widely credited with helping move CALS forward in dramatic ways, including by undertaking several major projects aimed at setting the ag college up for success well into the future.

One of those projects is a $45 million undertaking known as CAFE, which will

be the nation's largest and most advanced research center targeting the dairy and associated industries.

In addition to having all the components of a working dairy, the CAFE project – officially the Idaho Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment – will include a demonstration farm, food processing research, and workforce development training for the state's agricultural industry.

The 2,000-cow research dairy near Rupert will be the largest of its kind in the United States and will help the dairy industry solve some of its biggest challenges, including environmental ones.

CAFE scientists will conduct cutting-edge research related to the dairy industry, including research on lagoons, nutrient management and surface and ground water contamination, and odor and emissions control.

Edgar was set to travel to Rupert in May to tour the CAFE site with Parrella and other members of the university's leadership team.

Edgar holds a bachelor's degree in animal science, was raised on a family farm that had both cattle and sheep at one time, and she and her husband raised their kids on a cow-calf operation in Arkansas.

"I'm excited to go see that (CAFE project) in the next couple of weeks and see where we are with it," she told Farm Bureau before that visit. "Obviously, I have a passion for the livestock industry, particularly the cattle industry."

Parrella has said the CAFE research dairy will be milking cows in 2026 "and my goal is to make sure we reach that target," Edgar said.

The new dean is an Idaho native and grew up on a family-owned farm in Kuna.

Before joining WSU, Edgar spent three years at University of Georgia as a department head and 11 years at University of Arkansas, where she moved through the faculty ranks and served as assistant dean for student programs.

Besides her degree in animal science, she also holds a master's degree in agricultural systems, technology and education, and a doctorate in agricultural leadership, education and communication.

She has published more than 70 peer-reviewed journal articles and secured millions of dollars in grants and contracts.

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation CEO Zak Miller was on the search team that recommended Edgar as the new dean.

"Dr. Edgar's roots run deep in Idaho, and that grounding will be a great asset to the U of I and the farmers and ranchers of Idaho," he said.

Miller said Edgar's love of Idaho was apparent in his interactions with her.

"Her passion for agriculture and our great state gives me great hope that she will be able to lead CALS with vision and purpose," he said.

Miller said all of the CALS dean candidates provided impeccable resumes, "but resumes do not lead and inspire. Dr. Edgar's resume proved she is qualified and her enthusiasm and passion for CALS and Idaho are the reason she now has the great privilege of being Idaho's ag dean."

Agriculture in Idaho and Washington is not the same thing, but there are many similarities.

For example, Idaho and Washington rank 1-2 in the United States in potato, mint, chickpea and hop production, both are major milk-producing states, and both are major producers of hay and onions.

In addition, wheat is the top crop in the Pacific Northwest in terms of total acres and Washington has a big and established wine industry, while Idaho has an up-and-coming wine industry. Both states also have a lot of beef cattle.

Edgar believes the two states could and should be working closer together on major agricultural issues "because we have very similar commodities."

WSU and U of I are about eight miles apart.

"We absolutely should collaborate," Edgar said. "I'm looking at collaborating at a pretty high level with the incoming dean (of WSU) to find ways our joint institutions can support agriculture across our states."

CALS serves an important role for Idaho agriculture.

The ag college oversees nine agricultural research and extension centers around the state, where scientists study issues important to Idaho's farming and ranching community.

Through University of Idaho Extension, CALS serves all Idaho counties, with physical offices in 42 of the state's 44 counties.

The college is the only institution in the state to prepare ag teachers. According to the college, 117 of the 175 ag education teachers in Idaho have at least one degree from the University of Idaho. ■

DUVALL

Continued from page 2

Nominations are now open for the 2026 Farm Bureau Farm Dog of the Year contest, and I cannot wait to see who gets named top dog next January.

I know for each farm and ranch family, though, your dog will be "farm dog of the year" every year for the help and joy they bring. Because it is so hard to pick just one winner, we also have the People's Choice Pup contest.

Stay tuned for that popular social media contest this September when profiles of several dogs from the running for Farm Dog of the Year will be shared for the public to vote on.

This contest is important for families off the farm as well. Shining a spotlight on our dogs and their special place on our farms and in our hearts helps us connect with folks outside our fencerows.

Affection for our furry, four-legged friends is something we hold in common with folks from urban, suburban and rural areas alike. With that common ground, this contest offers folks who have never been on a farm another way to connect with agriculture.

'I've never seen a dog happier than when he is caked in mud and ready to join in to help with farm chores. Truly, farm dogs are some of the hardest workers around, and they are up to any task.'

You might even say that we could add another farm job to the list for our dogs, agricultural ambassador. But if your dogs are anything like my Ziggy, they might need a bath first.

I've never seen a dog happier than when he is caked in mud and ready to join in to help with farm chores. Truly, farm dogs are some of the hardest workers around, and they are up to any task.

So, does your farm dog have what it takes to be the next Farm Bureau Farm Dog of the Year?

You can encourage your friends and neighbors to apply, too. Just get those nominations in by July 11. The grand prize winner, selected by a panel of judges, will take home $5,000 in prize money and a year's worth of Purina Pro Plan dog food.

For more on the contest, to learn about past winners, and to submit a nomination, visit our website at fb.org. ■

MILLER

Continued from page 2

"For decades, heavy-handed federal policies have prevented full utilization of these resources and made us reliant on foreign producers," USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins stated in her memorandum on forest management March 15.

Too often, it seems that Idaho's common-sense approaches and local expertise are brushed aside in Washington.

Recently, however, a series of events has provided hope for our forests and air to become healthier.

In March, President Trump issued Executive Order 14092, titled "Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production."

This directive calls for increased timber production through sound forest management practices—welcome news that could unlock our forests' potential to provide needed timber while creating a pathway to begin healing this neglected resource.

Following this directive, on April 3, Rollins issued a memo outlining specific actions to increase timber production on national forest lands, reduce wildland fire risk, and improve overall forest health.

'The choice before us is whether we will implement thoughtful, sustainable management practices or continue allowing nature to impose its solutions through disease, infestation, and wildfire.'

Seizing on this rare moment of federal clarity, Governor Little responded on April 18 with an executive order demonstrating that Idaho stands ready, willing, and equipped with the expertise to move from words to action.

Idaho has established a successful track record of assisting our federal partners through the Good Neighbor Authority Program.

This cooperative agreement allows state forestry agencies to conduct restoration activities on federal lands.

Our Idaho Department of Lands possesses the expertise and practical knowledge necessary to help the U.S. Forest Service begin the long-neglected task of actively managing these lands.

This alignment between federal and state priorities presents a unique opportunity. As Aristotle recognized, nature will not leave a management vacuum unfilled.

The choice before us is whether we will implement thoughtful, sustainable management practices or continue allowing nature to impose its solutions through disease, infestation, and wildfire.

I am reminded of the characters Gus and Woodrow from "Lonesome Dove," who carried a sign with Latin or Greek writing across the country despite neither being able to read it.

For too long, we've approached forest management with similar uncertainty about direction and purpose. Now, with clear leadership at both federal and state levels, perhaps we have a moment when we just might be able to "Make our Forests Healthy Again." ■

SEARLE

Continued from page 2

This impact occurs despite the fact that much of our forestland is "off limits" to responsible management and harvest.

Eighty percent of Idaho's 21.5 million acres of forestland are owned and managed by the federal government, 14 percent is privately owned and 6 percent is owned by the state.

Now consider that 51 percent of the timber harvest in Idaho comes from private lands, 30 percent comes from state lands and only 19 percent comes from federal lands.

Something doesn't compute there.

This means a lot is being left on the proverbial table when it comes to the potential benefit of timberland to Idaho. And the U.S. for that matter.

For far too long, the federal government has not actively managed our forests. Besides leaving a lot of productive timberland off limits to responsible harvest, this has also led to the catastrophic forest fires we see every year.

Because our forests are not being actively and properly managed, this has led to the buildup of large fuel loads in federal forests. When fire breaks out, as it inevitably will, what would in past decades be a normal wildfire turns into a catastrophic one.

This isn't laying blame on any certain administration because this problem has been going on for many decades.

Finally, there may be light at the end of the tunnel when it comes to this issue.

An executive order signed by President Donald Trump calls for immediate efforts to significantly increase the domestic supply of timber, lumber and related wood products.

'May I remind you that active forest management is what allows access to recreational opportunities in Idaho's forests.'

The order – "Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production" – points out that "The United States has an abundance of timber resources that are more than adequate to meet our domestic timber production needs, but heavy-handed federal policies have prevented full utilization of these resources and made us reliant on foreign producers."

It adds: "These onerous federal policies have forced our nation to rely upon imported lumber, thus exporting jobs and prosperity and compromising our self-reliance. It is vital that we reverse these policies and increase domestic timber production to protect our national and economic security."

The executive order, signed March 1, orders that the U.S. Secretary of Commerce must report findings and recommend potential actions, which could include tariffs, quotas or other policy measures to bolster the U.S. timber and lumber supply chain.

"The Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture shall also each submit … any legislative proposals that would expand authorities to improve timber production and sound forest management," the order states.

The order aims to substantially increase U.S. lumber production and also better manage the nation's timberlands in an effort to help reduce major wildfires.

May I remind you that active forest management is what allows access to recreational opportunities in Idaho's forests.

Idaho's forest industry is still strong, but it isn't nearly as large and important as it once was.

Here's to hoping that is about to change. ■

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation®

2025 SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

AG WINNERS RECEIVED $3,000

JACEE FULLER - TWIN FALLS

EMMA WALTON - MINIDOKA

TEGAN ZOLLINGER - FRANKLIN

ABIGAIL WILLIAMS - CASSIA

JAYLIN WARD - BINGHAM

NON-AG WINNERS RECEIVED $2,000

IAN FILLMORE - BINGHAM

ELIANA CECIL - BUTTE

ABIGAIL ALLEN - BANNOCK

WYATT MCDONALD - BOUNDARY

KENZIE TUTTLE - OWYHEE

BEETLE

Continued from page 3

The beetle has of late made appearances in Caldwell and Pocatello. The ISDA has undertaken a major eradication effort in Caldwell and is keeping a close eye on the pest's presence in Pocatello and also trying to eradicate it there.

The ISDA requests permission from property owners in select Caldwell and Pocatello neighborhoods to conduct free treatments aimed at eradicating the Japanese beetle.

Canyon County, where Caldwell is located, is a particular concern because of its proximity to an extensive amount of farmland. The county not only has the most farms in the state – 2,113 – it's also one of the top seed-producing areas in the world and the center of Idaho's $500 million seed industry.

Pocatello in Bannock County is not surrounded by as much prime farmland as Caldwell is, but Thompson says ISDA is also paying close attention to the beetle in that city because it doesn't want it to even gain a small foothold in Idaho.

The department does have a good track record when it comes to fighting the beetle.

After dozens of Japanese beetles were detected in Boise in 2012 – the number of beetles detected in the Boise infestation exploded from 56 in year one to more than 3,000 in year two – the ISDA undertook a major eradication effort that resulted in the pest not being detected in Boise the past several years.

It was the largest documented Japanese beetle eradication in U.S. history, according to Thompson.

The ISDA is using the same type of template to go after the beetle in Caldwell and Pocatello.

In Caldwell, the beetle was first discovered in 2021 and then it expanded to become an infestation. The department responded aggressively and started treating for it in 2023 and 2024.

The pest's population in Caldwell peaked in 2023 at 260 and then went down to 132 in 2024.

"It's giving us every indication that that treatment is effective in cutting that population down and we're on the same curve as the successful Boise eradication," Thompson says.

The beetle's numbers in Pocatello have been relatively small since it was detected there in 2021 and the department was able to isolate the population last year. As a result, the ISDA will have a more defined treatment area this year.

"We're going to be more aggressive about that treatment area and increase the number of survey traps that we have there to make sure we're not missing any other infestations," Thompson says. "But we feel like we've got our thumb on it now and able to get that treatment honed in."

The beetle, native to Japan, was first detected in the U.S. in 1916 and is now found in most states east of the Mississippi River.

Idaho does have preventative controls designed to stop the introduction of Japanese beetles into Idaho from infested states in the East. But it still does get here.

"It's not foolproof," Thompson says of Idaho's protocols for stopping the beetle getting here. "It has a way of moving. It also does have the ability to hitchhike on aircraft and other means."

Photo by Sean Ellis

This Japanese beetle trap was set out by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture in Taysom Rotary Park in Pocatello.

Adult Japanese beetles are about a half-inch long and have metallic green bodies and coppery wing covers.

Adult beetles can leave holes in plants and skeletonize leaves.

The beetle has an appetite that extends to more than 300 species of plants, including some of Idaho's top crops.

Thompson says ISDA has received excellent cooperation from residents, cities and the ag industry itself in its war against the beetle.

"Without the support and participation from the public and people that are in these infestation areas, our city partners and the ag industry, this success would not be possible," she says.

The ag industry is very supportive of the department's efforts, Thompson says. That's due to the potential devastation the beetle can cause.

"The ag industry understands what it would mean to let this go," she says.

Besides causing decreased production, the beetle's permanent presence, if that ever happened, would mean increased pesticide use. There's also the potential of losing markets that could impose quarantine restrictions.

"We really encourage everyone within the treatment zones to help protect Idaho agriculture," Thompson says. "If they're not within the treatment zone, just be on the lookout and report anything that would even seem close to being a Japanese beetle to ISDA."

For more information about the pest, contact Thompson at (208) 332-8620 or by email at Andrea.Thompson@isda.idaho.gov. ■

IDAHO FORESTS ARE ONE OF THE STATE'S MAJOR ASSETS

BY SEAN ELLIS
IDAHO FARM BUREAU FEDERATION

Idaho's forest sector is one of the state's major assets and some people think it's underutilized.

That could be about to change, in a big way.

Idaho has a lot of farmland, but even more forestland.

According to the Idaho Forest Products Commission, there are 21.5 million acres of forestland in Idaho. USDA sets total farmland in Idaho at 11.5 million acres.

"The industry is a really big player in Idaho economically," said IFPC Executive Director Jennifer Okerlund Frederickson.

According to the commission, the forest industry contributes about $2.8 billion to the state's economy each year and is responsible for 31,000 jobs.

In addition, the sale of timber from state endowment lands contributes about $62 million each year to Idaho schools. That's all schools in Idaho, not just those in timber country.

"Even if you don't have trees in your back yard in the state of Idaho, you're still benefiting from the timber industry," Frederickson said. "We really are a major player in the state's economy."

Excluding the economic benefit, the state's forests also play an important role in other ways.

Roughly 40 percent of Idaho is covered with forestland.

"Beyond their economic value, (forests) provide clean water and air, wildlife habitat, recreation opportunities, biodiversity, and sustainable and renewable wood products," said Audra Cochran, a University of Idaho Extension educator in Clearwater County.

"Forests shape the landscape, culture, and communities of our state," she added. "In my opinion, Idaho's forests are a big part of what makes Idaho such a special place to live."

The state's forest industry is strong, but it's not as strong as it once was. However, that could be on the verge of changing.

Over the past 50 years or so, Frederickson said, the federal government has made philosophical changes to the nation's forest management policies that have resulted in less active management.

Besides resulting in less harvesting, that has also led to less active management, such as mechanized thinning.

As a result, many sawmills have closed all over the state and the forest products industry in Idaho and the Northwest isn't nearly as prominent as it once was.

However, there is growing hope that is about to change, and in a big way.

On March 1, President Donald Trump signed an executive order titled, "Immediate Expansion of American Timber Production."

It states, in part: "The United States has an abundance of timber resources that are more than adequate to meet our domestic timber production needs, but heavy-handed federal policies have prevented full utilization of these resources and made us reliant on foreign producers."

The order says the inability to fully use the domestic timber supply has impeded "the creation of jobs and prosperity, contributed to wildfire disasters, degraded fish and wildlife habitats, increased the cost of construction and energy, and threatened our economic security."

These onerous federal policies, according to the executive order, "have forced our nation to rely upon imported lumber, thus exporting jobs and prosperity and compromising our self-reliance. It is vital that we reverse these policies and increase domestic timber production to protect our national and economic security."

The order directed the Secretary of the Interior and Secretary of Agriculture to issue new or updated guidance on tools to facilitate increased timber production and sound forest management.

The order sets a target for the annual amount of timber on federal lands to be offered for sale over the next four years to be measured in millions of board feet.

Gov. Brad Little applauded the order and directed state agencies to recommend opportunities to align with the president's executive order.

"With a fresh perspective at the Forest Service, Idaho stands ready to help transform how our federal lands and fires are managed, leading to invigorated rural communities," Little said in a news release.

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation photo

Idaho's timber industry is not as big as it once was, but that could be about to change.

Of the 21.5 million acres of forestland in Idaho, 80 percent are managed by the federal government, 14 percent are privately owned and 6 percent are owned by the state. However, 51 percent of timber harvest in Idaho comes from private lands, 30 percent from state lands and only 19 percent from federal lands.

If the president's executive order does translate into a lot more timber being harvested from federal lands, that could be a boon to the Idaho and U.S. forest products sector.

The actions resulting from the executive order have sent a jolt of hopeful excitement through many people involved in the timber industry.

Already, the changes since the executive order was issued are noticeable, said Tim Kemery, who owns a cattle ranch just outside Challis and does custom logging.

For example, on May 6, USDA announced $23 million in grants to support the transportation of hazardous forest fuel such as dead and downed trees from national forests to processing facilities.

"Removing hazardous fuels not only reduces wildfire risk but also creates opportunities for businesses and workers in the wood products industry," USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins said in a news release announcing the grants.

"Our nation is blessed with an abundance of resources and there is no reason we cannot responsibly harvest and use these products right here at home," Rollins added.

Kemery, who serves on Idaho Farm Bureau Federation's forestry committee, has seen three lumber mills in his region close since 1997 because of litigation by environmental groups that shut down timber sales and thus mills.

"The changes occurring since the executive order are massive," he said. "It's literally miraculous."

The changes in how federal forest managers now approach timber sales, how they deal with fires and approach active management, such as thinning, are noticeable, Kemery said.

"I'm very encouraged. It's almost unbelievable it's so wonderful," he said.

For the past several decades, Kemery said, the American timber industry has faced a tough challenge when it comes to lumber sales and pricing because subsidized lumber imported from other nations has undercut it.

"It's been hard to make it," he said. "Now that's going to change, hopefully."

Howard Weeks, who farms north of Orofino and also serves on IFBF's forestry committee, said the hiring of Tom Schultz as chief of the U.S. Forest Service was in itself a big blessing to the Idaho and U.S. forest industry.

Schultz served as director of the Idaho Department of Lands and previously as vice president of resources for Idaho Forest Group.

Schultz knows the forest sector as well as anyone, Weeks said, and his selection in itself is a win for the industry.

"That was a huge move," he said. "Tom knows the forests of Idaho, and U.S. forests, so well. I'm glad I've lived long enough to see Tom Schultz, or an individual like him, selected as chief of the Forest Service."

Weeks said he is also hopeful that things are turning positively for the industry and pointed out the forests of north and north-central Idaho in particular are some of the most productive in the Northwest.

"I'm very encouraged," he said. "These forests are very productive and it's very, very important to Idaho that these forests are managed as healthy forests." ■

‘Kiss of French’ lip balm made with real potatoes

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE – Besides being just plain fun, the Idaho Potato Commission’s gimmicky stunts have a purpose: to make Idaho and potatoes synonymous in people’s minds.

“We’re trying to get it so everybody in the world, when they think of potatoes, the first thing they think of is Idaho,” said IPC President and CEO Jamey Higham.

That’s already pretty much the case, but the IPC, which represents the state’s spud industry, wants to ensure it stays that way.

The commission’s latest gimmick was Kiss of French, a potato-flavored lip balm released just in time for Valentine’s Day this year.

The lip balm, which sold out in two days, was made with real Idaho potatoes in the formula.

Higham said the lip balm “was just one of these promotions we do to coincide with Valentine’s Day to try to get people to be more aware of Idaho potatoes.”

He said it’s also a way to reach a different group of people about the Idaho potato brand than would be typically reached through the commission’s normal TV commercials and other promotions.

“This way, we reach a little different group of people that are not necessarily in the grocery store or watching TV, where they see our commercials,” Higham said. “It’s just one more way to get name recognition out there in an inexpensive way.”

In 2022, the IPC released a limited supply of potato-themed fragrance in conjunction with Valentine’s Day. The perfume – Frites by Idaho – was made from distilled Idaho potatoes and essential oils.

The potato commission won’t see its numbers for the lip balm promotion for a while, but the perfume registered about a billion impressions, Higham said.

“To pay for that type of exposure would be insanely expensive and we get it for not very much,” he said.

It’s difficult to measure how well these promotions are working, but anecdotally, they appear to be paying off, he adds.

“There’s no real black-and-white measurement except that we know for us and farmers, whenever you go anywhere and people hear you’re from Idaho, the response is always, ‘potatoes,’” Higham said.

The IPC was created in 1937 to make people aware of “the great potatoes that grow in Idaho and it’s working,” he adds.

The potato commission is funded 100 percent by the industry itself and receives no taxpayer funds.

In 2023, the commission teamed up with the Van Leeuwen ice cream company to produce a limited edition product that paired malted milkshake flavored ice cream with French fry bites.

The lip balm, perfume and potato-themed ice cream all sold out quickly.

Higham knows these promotions are gimmicks but they are also fun, inexpensive ways to keep the Idaho potato connection going.

“It’s a gimmick, it really is,” he said. “But it’s how you get people’s attention. It’s a way to get the Idaho potato name out there without spending a lot of money.”

It probably doesn’t matter whether people are actually using them or buying them more as souvenirs, Higham said.

“I think people know that it’s not a serious, serious product,” he said. “They probably are buying them because they’re cool. It’s different.”

So, what’s up for next year?

“We don’t have one in the chamber yet for next year, but we’ll come up with something,” Higham said. ■

Photo by Jim McKelvey

While boating on Mackay Reservoir in 2010, Jim McKelvey happened to see the White Horse grazing contentedly.

Aged yet still hardy, the White Horse of Black Daisy Canyon is doing well

By Dianna Troyer
For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Photo by Dianna Troyer

For 30 years, a sturdy gelding has been living alone near Mackay Reservoir in the Lost River Valley of central Idaho, relying on food and water in a scenic canyon.

To the delight of his countless devotees, the aged White Horse of Black Daisy Canyon in central Idaho has survived yet another winter living alone.

The hermit, first seen in 1995 in a scenic canyon west of Mackay Reservoir, was part of a pack string and wandered away from a hunting camp, according to local lore. He has become a cherished symbol of rugged western individualism, self-reliance, and freedom.

Residents, estimating he is in his early 30s, often check on him, noting he always keeps his distance from people. During the past two decades, they have watched the sturdy robust diminutive gelding turn from a dark dapple gray as a youngster to white, a natural progression of his genetic coloring.

"This spring, he looked to be in good shape," said Bill Hardy, a Mackay resident who saw him in late April. "I always watch for him when I'm up there and like checking on him."

Warren Trogden of Challis saw him in late April, too. When he goes to Pocatello, Trogden often stops by the campground on the east side of the reservoir and sets up his spotting scope to glass for the elusive equine on the opposite side.

"He still looks healthy despite his age," Trogden said. "He was fine and moving around well. In the winter, his coat has a gray tint to it, then sheds out to be all white by summer."

Trogden has seen the horse every year since 1995 when he started working for the Bureau of Land Management as an equipment operator and maintenance worker. Before retiring in 2023,

he took care of the campground and talked to campers who came regularly to look for the horse.

To locals, he's simply the White Horse while some out-of-area campers call him the Spirit Horse or the Ghost Horse, a mythical figure thought to bring good luck to those fortunate enough to see him.

While the White Horse's longevity astounds his fans, a local veterinarian said horses have evolved to thrive in such conditions.

"They have an incredibly efficient digestive system that produces heat to get them through winter," said Dr. Jeff Bennetts, owner of Lone Pine Animal Hospital in Challis about 50 miles north of Mackay. During summers, he has seen the White Horse grazing near the reservoir.

"He's actually in a more natural routine than our domesticated horses. Horses evolved to eat a lot of nutritious grass in summer and put on weight, then lose it slowly during winter. They acclimate to winter as they burn those fat reserves. It's more normal than us feeding our horses year-round. He stays hydrated by eating snow."

As far as predators are concerned, "Horses are very capable of defending themselves by kicking and biting," he said. "From talking to some cowboys who have cattle in the area and see him, he's really skittish and runs from whatever he perceives as a threat. The thing that will eventually weaken him is that his teeth will wear down as he ages, and he'll have a hard time grinding his forage."

The White Horse even has fans who have never seen him. After reading about him on social media, Caldwell artist Kayla Cuellar painted him in a watercolor she named "Spirit of Lost River Valley." She says he reminds her of her uncle who worked as a game warden in the valley years ago.

"To me, my uncle and the horse both embody the ideal of being free and living on their own terms," she said.

Last year, Twin Falls musicians wrote a ballad about him and toured the state singing it. Bruce Michael Miller and Heather Platts, known as Crazy Love Duo, included it in their "Idaho Originals" program, a musical and literary travelogue funded through an Idaho Arts Council grant.

The grant enabled Miller and Platts to write eight original songs about unique features of Idaho and to publish an accompanying book with photos and artwork for each song.

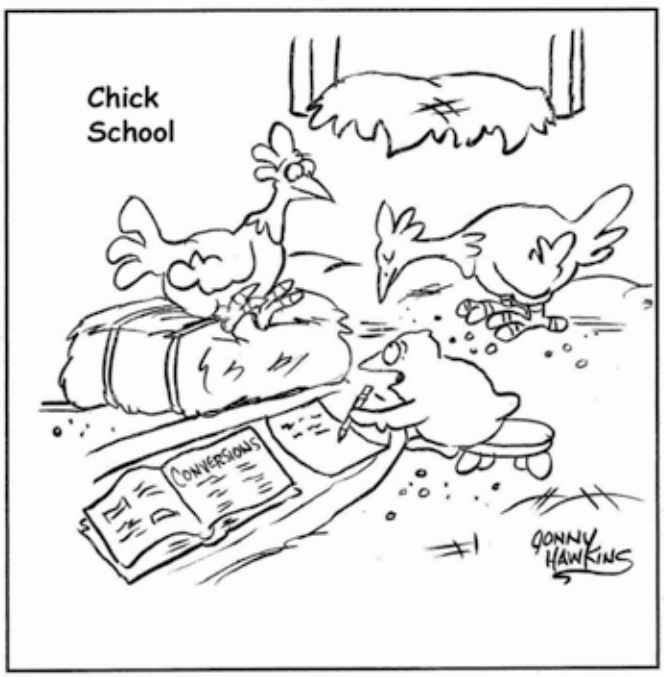
The final lyric of their ballad sums up his admirers' attitude. "The White Horse of Black Daisy Canyon … made his escape and captured our hearts."

Another longtime fan, Barbara Harp has photographed him several years in early May when he stood basking in the sun on a high rocky ridge across the road from her home.

"Every spring, I'm cautiously optimistic that he'll be back," she said. "I always hope he puts on enough weight during summer and fall to get through another winter." ■

Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins



"Mom, how many pecks in a yard?"

"No, actually they're cherry tomatoes."

Photo by Bill Schaefer

Rachael Bickerton, director of government and external relationships with the University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, describes the rotary milking parlor at the Idaho Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment (Idaho CAFE) to a tour group including members of the state's Permanent Building Fund Advisory Council.

U of I research dairy raising the bar for innovation

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

RUPERT – Innovation and efficiency will be the hallmarks of the Idaho Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment (Idaho CAFE), a University of Idaho-led facility under construction in the Magic Valley that will include the nation's largest research dairy.

CAFE, located near Rupert, is scheduled to commence milking operations by early 2026, starting with about 400 cows in the first year and gradually ramping up to about 2,000 cows, to reflect the size of an average Idaho dairy herd.

The project's first phase, which includes major earth work and construction of a milking barn with a modern rotary parlor, has been completed and the next phase of construction (maternity and commodity barns and classrooms) is underway.

In early May, U of I led a tour of lawmakers, local officials and members of the state's Permanent Building Fund Advisory Council to showcase the return on the considerable investment they've made in CAFE.

CAFE has been made possible by a partnership involving U of I, industry and government. In 2017, the Idaho Legislature appropriated $10 million from the state's Permanent Building Fund to help finance the project.

"This is the first time you can do research on this kind of a scale in the U.S. ever, so this is a big deal. We need to keep on supporting this facility. It's going to mean a lot for Idaho and the Idaho economy."

– Idaho Sen. Kelly Anthon, R-Rupert

In September 2022, the Idaho Board of Land Commissioners awarded $23.25 million toward CAFE from the sale of U of I endowment land in Caldwell that was no longer being used for experimental farming.

During the 2025 session, the legislature appropriated $250,000 toward building maintenance funds for the new milking parlor.

As part of the tour showcasing CAFE's innovations, visitors learned about the water reuse system incorporated into the dairy. The water used to rapidly chill milk from approximately 101 degrees to 38 degrees is captured and repurposed in an automated, self-flushing system to clean the milking-parlor floor.

Afterward, this same water is reused once more to irrigate crops raised within an adjacent soil and water demonstration farm.

With the support of automation, the milking parlor can be efficiently operated by a team of just three employees per shift, who can accommodate the entire CAFE herd in under three hours.

Robots will spray cows' teats with sanitizer prior to each milking, a task typically done manually by dairy workers. A separate robotic system will sanitize teats again following milking, and milking units will automatically be sanitized and flushed between milking each cow.

The facility will achieve additional labor efficiencies through an automated crowd gate, with a bar that will lower behind cows within the holding pen, slowly moving forward and guiding them through the parlor entrance.

Ear tags will link cows to computerized records detailing individual characteristics, health records, lactation history, age, pregnancy status and other relevant information.

Furthermore, specialized collars — essentially bovine pedometers — will track cows' movements, as well as the number of steps they take. The data will be useful in helping the CAFE staff assess animal health and determine which cows may be in heat, given that cows tend to take far more steps when they are in heat.

A sensor inside the rumen of each cow will alert dairy personnel when animals become sick well before they are symptomatic.

During the winter, a concrete pad by the front entrance will use radiant heating to prevent spilled milk from freezing and posing a safety hazard.

Tour groups will observe dairy operations through a window from atop a catwalk, maintaining a quiet atmosphere for cows.

The facility will provide research into challenges affecting Idaho dairies at an industry scale, making findings more applicable to their operations. The dairy industry collaborated closely with U of I in designing CAFE.

"This is the first time you can do research on this kind of a scale in the U.S. ever, so this is a big deal," Idaho Sen. Kelly Anthon, R-Rupert, told the CAFE tour group. "We need to keep on supporting this facility. It's going to mean a lot for Idaho and the Idaho economy."

Idaho is the third largest producer of dairy products in the U.S., and Anthon noted the Magic Valley has benefited from $1.9 billion in capital expenditures in food processing facilities, accounting for 900 new jobs, in the past two years alone.

Anthon, who is also Rupert's city administrator, mentions CAFE at the start of any meeting in which he seeks to entice foreign companies to invest in the Magic Valley.

"When we meet with these companies, we're saying to them, 'Look, if you are anywhere in this sector, you ought to know that the largest research dairy in the U.S. is located in Rupert, Idaho,' and you tie that in with the largest yogurt factory in the world in our region," Anthon said. "You start selling all these things and talking about logistics, and some of these companies will say, 'You know, we ought to be in Idaho,' especially if they are dairy related."

The classroom space now under construction will include an advanced distance-learning facility, where U of I will host classes for graduate and undergraduate students, Extension courses, workforce development instruction and collaborative classes with community colleges.

Professor Mireille Chahine, acting head of the Department of Animal, Veterinary and Food Sciences, envisions using the facility to connect with professors at the Moscow campus, other U of I Research and Extension Centers and even global experts who will be invited as guest speakers.

She expects universities worldwide will wish to collaborate on work at CAFE, which could lay the groundwork for Idaho to open new trade markets. Being based at CAFE will also provide students with hands-on learning activities in a real-world setting.

The final phase will add shaded pens, concrete lanes for cows and a manure processing facility for testing and evaluating manure treatment and nutrient separation technologies.

Matt Powell, interim associate dean of research and director of the Idaho Agricultural Experiment Station, recently toured one of Spain's largest and most innovative dairies.

The dairy operators told Powell they implemented many of their innovative concepts following a tour of Idaho's dairy industry. Powell believes CAFE will keep Idaho at the forefront of dairy innovation and maintain the state's global reputation for ingenuity.

"That's exactly the sort of impact we want to maintain, progress and move forward with this facility," Powell said. "The world is looking to us to lead in that direction." ■

Conservation: the core of every farm and ranch

By Samantha Ayoub
AFBF Economist

The word "conservation" isn't as catchy as buzzwords and phrases like "sustainability," "regenerative" or "climate smart," but they're all at the root of farmers' and ranchers' core value of being good stewards of the land they rely on to support their operations today and for future generations.

Healthy land

Farmers' number one asset is land. Whether they're growing crops or raising livestock – or both – farmers use practices that maintain or improve the high quality of their land. Conserving land includes protecting soil health, retaining water and attracting pollinators, all of which benefits the farm and the environment.

Healthy soil, essential to growing crops and to providing forage for livestock, was the foundation of conservation efforts by the United States government starting in 1929, prompted by the Dust Bowl.

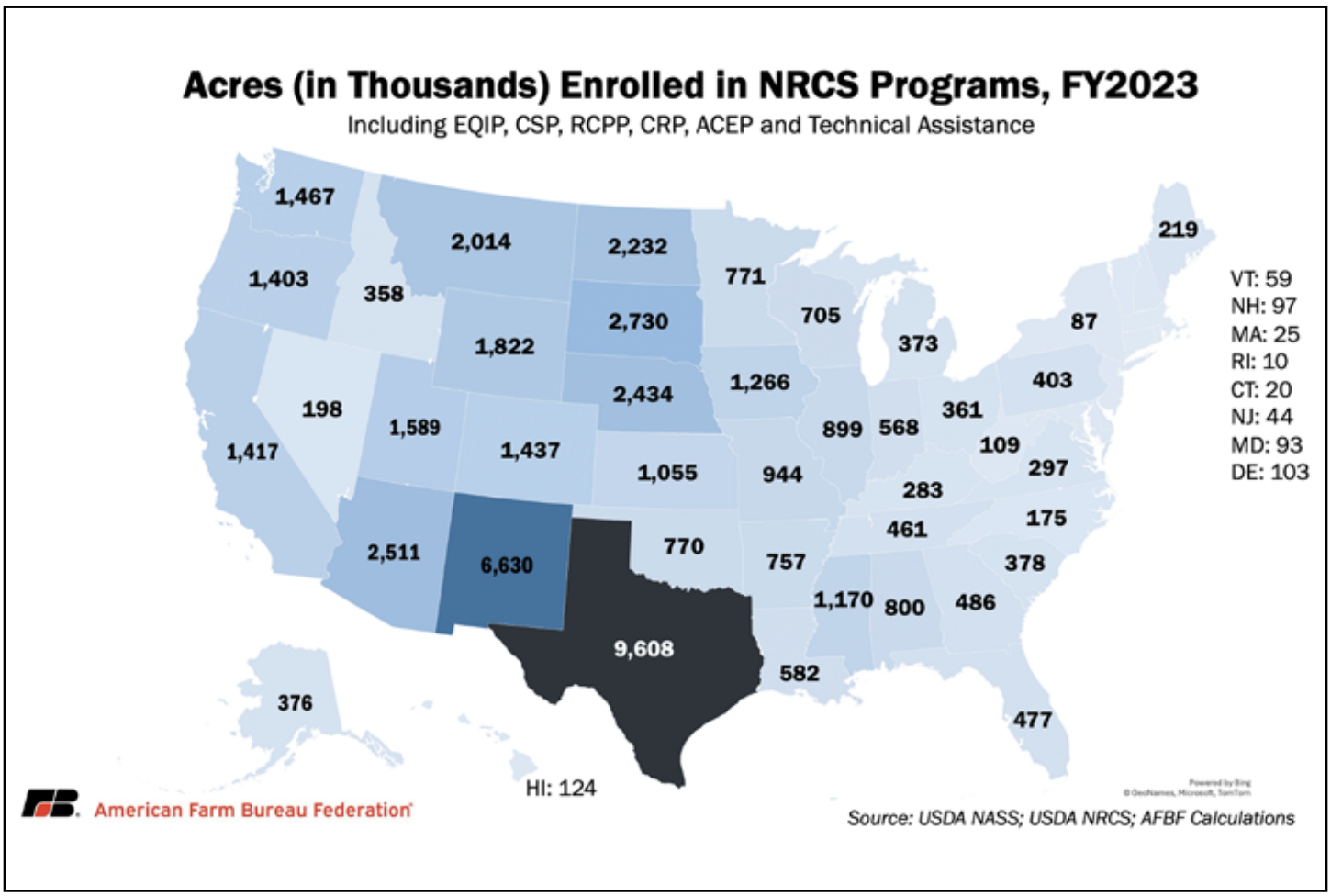
USDA stepped into conservation services on a large scale beginning in 1935 when the Soil Conservation Act created the Soil Conservation Service, what eventually became the modern Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Now, NRCS promotes stewardship of all resources – water, soil, air and biodiversity. They allocate over $3.7 billion a year in financial assistance for farmers and ranchers and provide additional technical consultation to help install conservation practices on more than 53 million acres nationwide each year – an area the size of Idaho.

There are over 100 individual practices eligible for NRCS assistance, tailored to the management needs of the diverse resources and agricultural production across the country.

The top practices funded each year range from cover cropping and reduced tillage that promote soil health to sprinkler systems that better manage scarce water use to planting trees and shrubs that provide wind breaks for homes and livestock while also slowing wind erosion.

Farms and ranches may also fulfill their NRCS contracts and continue utilizing conservation methods or implement conservation practices without initial support. For example, more than 200 million acres nationwide are operated using reduced or no tillage.



Targeted programs may be developed in some states to meet specific resource needs or USDA priority areas. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) also incentivizes continued agricultural innovation from businesses or farmers and ranchers themselves through Conservation Innovation Grants.

Farm and ranch conservation practices are widespread, and many are norms in farm production.

Around 90%of major row crops are grown in some sort of rotation. Rotating crops maintains nutrient balance in soil and discourages weed growth. Managed grazing maintains soil cover to prevent erosion, increases soil organic matter and improves soil structure to help retain water, reducing drought impacts.

Nutrient management focuses on applying agricultural chemicals like fertilizer, manure or pesticides at the correct volume and effective time to prevent runoff of excess nutrients and maintain soil nutrient balance. These traditional conservation practices all also have important economic benefits, which promotes their widespread adoption.

Healthy farms

Conservation practices come with economic tradeoffs, but many have benefits. In the short term, some practices reduce the inputs needed for farming.

No-till reduces the number of tractor passes over a field, reducing equipment wear, lowering fuel needs and saving farmers' time; however, if used in combination with cover cropping, not tilling would increase the need for herbicides.

Nutrient management plans can reduce production costs by limiting chemical inputs, but they need additional investments in soil testing to create and monitor the plan.

Crop rotation reduces the need for some chemical inputs by balancing soil nutrients and limiting pests. It can also help farmers spread their risk by diversifying since they are not reliant on market changes of only one crop.

Over time, traditional conservation improves traits like soil organic matter, groundwater recharge or increased biodiversity that help the natural environment better sustain crops and forage without constant management.

In the long term, all these practices make the environment even better, which is why environmental conservation is often called "regenerative," and retaining and restoring soil are key to a farm's economic health for today and for future generations.

Healthy communities

Runoff is the equivalent of money running right off your fields. Preventing runoff of soil, water and inputs not only protects farmland, but also benefits the community.

As farmers and ranchers raise their families and live on their farms and in their rural communities, it is also in their interest to protect the resources of the area.

Some NRCS programs focus on bringing together farmers and ranchers, local governments and the greater community to target the health of entire areas. Watershed programs improve water quality and availability and reduce flood damage to farms and rural communities.

The Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watershed Initiative(MRBI) has implemented conservation on 1.5 million acres, reducing sediment loss by over 2.4 million tons and phosphorous and nitrogen runoff by over 25 million pounds combined.

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program leverages collaboration between local entities and the federal government to target resource projects crucial to specific areas.

Both individual farm conservation methods and community-wide initiatives have critical benefits to maintaining farmland health and ensuring communities nationwide have clean, sufficient water and land.

Other benefits

As science progresses, new benefits are linked to agricultural conservation. Most recently, incentives were made to practices that promote carbon sequestration, a naturally occurring process in plants.

Many of the conservation practices that improve soil health also improve the ability of plants to hold carbon in the soil simply because the land is better equipped to hold and retain nutrients.

In 2022, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) dedicated $18 billion to NRCS conservation programs that "directly improve soil carbon, reduce nitrogen losses, or reduce, capture, avoid, or sequester carbon dioxide, methane, or nitrous oxide emissions, associated with agricultural production."

Programs under the new funding were dubbed "climate smart" since reduction and sequestration of these gases were expected to combat agricultural contributions to global emissions and climate change.

These practices are largely the same traditional conservation practices farmers have been using for decades – the climate benefits were just being highlighted. In fact, more than half of the practices funded by standard farm bill conservation programs also received IRA funding.

Conclusion

Operating on an outdated farm bill limits farmers' and ranchers' ability to invest in traditional practices since inflation has reduced the value of conservation funding dollars in the 2018 farm bill.

Some conservation programs lost all of their funding in the last extension of the farm bill.

Yet, conservation funding has gotten tangled in conservation buzzwords, leaving farmers and ranchers trying to take care of their land in the middle of the knot.

Overall, conservation is at the heart of farming and ranching. To continue to operate, farmers and ranchers are reliant on land, water and nutrients that are healthy and stable, and it is in their best interest to take steps to protect them.

Any other benefits we find along the way – and the names society ties to them – are added bonuses to the work agriculture has been doing for generations. ■

Idaho brings back retro 'famous potatoes' license plates

Submitted photo

Idahoans could soon see retro 1950s-style black and white license plates with World Famous Potatoes on them driving around the state.

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE – As early as this summer, Idahoans could see retro 1950s-style black and white license plates with World Famous Potatoes on them driving around the state.

The legislature this year approved the vintage plates by an overwhelming combined vote of 99-1.

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

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

But Rep. Doug Pickett, the Republican rancher and spud farmer from Oakley who carried the bill in the House, believes the black and white plate will be the popular one.

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

Some people might think Idaho potatoes became famous in the 1950s, when Marilyn Monroe famously posed for a photo shoot in a potato sack and when Idaho first began to lead the nation in total potato production.

But the Idaho Potato Commission, which introduced the idea of the retro plates to the Idaho Legislature after doing some research on the history of Idaho license plates, has found Idaho license plates with potatoes on them as far back as 1928.

"Idaho potatoes have been famous for a long time," said IPC President and CEO Jamey Higham.

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 completely funded by the state's potato industry and receives no taxpayer funds.

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," said Sam Eaton, the IPC's vice president of legal and government affairs.

Two decades ago, there was a movement by some people to remove potatoes from Idaho license plates. Now, spuds are not only on the regular red, white and blue license plates but they will be on the retro plates as well for people who choose to purchase them.

Not only that, but thousands of people turn out every year in the bitter cold to watch a large potato lowered in Boise to ring in the new year and an estimated 25,000 people turned out just to celebrate the humble spud last year in Kleiner Memorial Park in Meridian.

"The way the state has embraced being the potato state is pretty cool to watch because it hasn't always been that way in my lifetime," says Higham, who turns 59 this year.

Higham said he 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."

Eaton said that not only native Idahoans but newcomers as well have embraced living in a state most known for potatoes.

"I think people moving here have really embraced the image of Idaho being associated with potatoes," he said.

The IPC was founded in 1937 to promote Idaho potatoes. Having spuds on the state's license plates helps accomplish that mission.

Eaton calls it "an advertisement on wheels."

Higham has no idea how many people will purchase the retro plates but suspects they will be popular.

"Who knows for sure how this black plate will do, but I think people are going to go crazy about it and it will be real popular," he said. "It's exciting. I can't wait until I see the first one on the road." ■

U of I wins national soil judging contest

University of Idaho News Release

MOSCOW, Idaho – University of Idaho placed first overall during the 2025 National Collegiate Soil Judging Contest, hosted from April 27-May 2 in Wisconsin.

The contest included 27 teams, and U of I was the sole team with multiple students placing among the top 10 individuals out of 198 participants. Sky Reinhardt, a junior agricultural systems management major from Bonners Ferry, placed fifth, and Jacob Flick, a senior mechanical engineering major from Gooding, placed eighth. Tegan Macy, a junior crop science major from Culver, Oregon, placed 25th.

U of I has participated in soil judging dating back to the 1980s but had never previously placed in the top five of the competition. U of I's previous best performances came in 2024, when the team finished sixth, and in 2023, when the team finished seventh. U of I is the first team from the Northwest region to win the competition.

U of I had the fewest members on a national championship team since West Virginia University won the competition in 2016. U of I scored 2,819 points in victory. University of Delaware, which scored 2,749 points, and University of Maryland, which scored 2,721 points, rounded out the top three teams.

The competition involves assessing soil pits, both as a team and individually. Competitors must evaluate the soil based on texture, color, structure, wetness indicators and other properties.

They must identify hydrologic, geologic and agronomic properties. They must also assign a taxonomic classification of the soil and interpret practical uses for the soil such as home construction, septic tank drainage and road construction.

Potato growing suitability was a new feature in the recent contest to recognize Wisconsin's potato industry and was an addition the Vandals found to their advantage.

Participants are given an hour to complete their assessments.

Photo courtesy of Paul Tietz

The University of Idaho soil judging team is pictured with the Bidwell-Reisig National Soil Judging Championship Trophy. From left: Hannah Poland, Daniel Middelhoven, Tegan Macy (with first-place overall team plaque), Sky Reinhardt (with fifth-place individual judging plaque), Coach Paul Tietz (with trophy), Logan Mann (with second-place group judging plaque), Jacob Flick (with eighth-place individual judging plaque), and coach MaryBeth Gavin.

Other U of I team members who participated in the national competition included Tobee Holman, a senior in agricultural systems management from Rigby; Logan Mann, a junior soil science and chemistry double major from Littleton, Colorado; Daniel Middelhoven, a sophomore crop management major from Kuna; and Hannah Poland, a senior agricultural economics major from East Wenatchee, Washington.

The team is coached by Paul Tietz, a soil and land resources doctoral student originally from Waunakee, Wisconsin, and MaryBeth Gavin, a soil and land resources master's student originally from Jacksonville, North Carolina. Robert Heinse, head of the Department of Soil and Water Systems, is the advisor.

Looking ahead, U of I will return five judges next year, as the team will compete in Grand Junction, Colorado seeking their fourth consecutive regional title. North Carolina State University in Raleigh, North Carolina, will host the 2026 National Collegiate Soil Judging Contest.

The winners of the 2026 national contest will advance to the World Congress of Soil Science International Soil Judging Contest, which takes place every four years and will be held in June 2026 in Nanjing, China. ■

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Twisted Tops and Stunted Growth

Introducing the white pine weevil

By Randy Brooks
University of Idaho

I spent a week over in Eastern Idaho last month teaching and conducting Extension forestry programs and I noticed many landscape spruces had dead terminal leaders, something I had noticed across the state last year.

Top kill of the terminal leader is usually caused by the white pine weevil (Pissodes strobi), one of the most destructive insect pests of young pine and spruce trees in North America.

Despite its small size, the damage it causes can have long-term impacts on forest structure, and ornamental tree form. This pest is notorious for causing forked, stunted, or deformed trees that never reach their full potential.

The white pine weevil is a type of beetle belonging to the family Curculionidae (true weevils). Adult weevils are about ¼' long, reddish-brown to dark brown, with white and tan scales on their backs forming a distinct V-shaped marking.

They have a characteristic long snout or "rostrum" used for feeding and laying eggs. Larvae are creamy white, legless, and C-shaped with brown heads.

It is the larval stage that causes the most damage by tunneling through the cambium of terminal shoots, effectively girdling and killing the leader.

Although named after eastern white pine (Pinus strobus), the white pine weevil prefers many tree species, especially in landscapes and reforested areas. Key hosts include pines, spruces, and Douglas-firs.

Young trees between 3 and 20 feet tall are most vulnerable, particularly in sunny, open settings where the tops of the trees are warm and dry—conditions ideal for weevil activity.

Photos by Tom Eckberg

White pine weevil adults on a spruce tree leader.

The life cycle of the white pine weevil is closely tied to warm, dry conditions and young, vigorous terminal leaders of host trees. Adults overwinter in leaf litter at the base of trees.

As temperatures rise in early spring, adults emerge from leaf litter, climb their host trees, and start feeding on the terminal leader. Female weevils chew small holes near the terminal bud, where they deposit their eggs.

About a week after being laid, eggs hatch, and larvae begin tunneling downward just beneath the bark where they feed on the phloem and cambium tissues, girdling the shoot and disrupting the flow of nutrients and water.

By mid to late summer, larvae complete their development and enter the pupal stage, settling near the base of the dead shoot. This stage marks their transformation into adults, which emerge in late summer.

Female weevils chew small holes near the terminal bud, where they deposit their eggs, as seen here.

Although fully developed, these new adults do not reproduce immediately, but descend back to the ground, seeking out leaf litter to overwinter until the following spring, when the cycle begins anew.

The most distinctive symptom of white pine weevil damage is the wilting and death of the terminal (top) shoot, typically seen in late spring or early summer.

Key indicators include: a shepherd's crook formation where the dead leader droops into a curved shape resembling a shepherd's staff; resin oozing where pitch may drip from wounds where eggs were laid or where larvae are feeding; multiple leaders where lateral branches grow upright to replace the dead central shoot causing forked or bushy tops; and stunted growth where affected trees often lose several inches to feet of vertical growth annually.

White pine weevil damage reduces the straightness and height of trees, both critical for high-value timber. Forked or crooked trees are less desirable and often excluded from harvest.

In Christmas tree farms and landscape nurseries, visual appeal is critical and damaged trees are frequently unsellable.

While the white pine weevil rarely kills trees outright, it weakens them, affects their form, and reduces their value, especially in timber and Christmas tree production.

Controlling white pine weevil requires a combination of cultural, mechanical, chemical, and biological approaches. Because infestations are usually localized to the top of the tree, management focuses on protecting the leader and encouraging natural tree form.

Begin scouting in early spring as temperatures approach 60 degrees. Check for feeding holes, resin flow, and adult weevils on terminal shoots. Inspect the previous year's leader for wilting in late spring or early summer.

Cultural controls include avoiding planting susceptible species in sunny, exposed sites where weevils thrive. Dense canopies may reduce weevil activity by keeping terminal leader's cooler.

Narrow spacing in young plantations can minimize individual tree visibility to weevils. Consider planting resistant or less susceptible species in high-risk areas.

For mechanical control, prune out and destroy infested leaders in late spring or early summer before adults emerge. Do this by cutting 6–8 inches below the lowest visible tunneling and train a lateral branch to become the new leader.

Burn or chip infested tops which prevent larvae from completing development.

Insecticides may be used preventively, but timing is crucial. Apply in early April on the first nice weekend (before egg-laying), targeting adults by spraying the top two feet of the tree. Use products labeled for weevil control, typically containing permethrin (Astro is a brand name).

Chemical control is not practical for large forest stands but can be effective in landscape ornamental or Christmas tree settings.

Natural predators such as birds and parasitic wasps help regulate weevil populations but are generally not enough to prevent damage in isolated plantings.

Encouraging biodiversity and avoiding broad-spectrum pesticides can support these beneficial insects.

White pine weevil will remain a persistent challenge for pine and spruce growers across the United States. However, the combination of attentive monitoring, insecticides, timely leader pruning, and thoughtful site and species selection can drastically reduce its long-term impact.

In conclusion, the white pine weevil is a small insect with a big impact. Its preference for the growing tip of pines and spruces makes it a serious threat to both commercial forestry and landscape ornamental tree aesthetics.

With proactive management and an understanding of its life cycle, this pest can be controlled. Whether you're tending a backyard blue spruce or managing a pine plantation, staying alert to the signs of weevil activity and acting quickly can help protect your trees' form, health, and value. ■

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

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The Idaho Preferred website has become the go-to resource for discovering local Idaho agriculture products and experiences for consumers and businesses alike. One of the many ways the ISDA Idaho Preferred Program promotes local farmers and ranchers across the state is through the creation of digital directories and guides that spotlight Idaho-grown and Idaho-made products, helping connect consumers directly with producers.

FARMERS MARKET FINDER

The **Idaho Preferred Farmers Market Directory** gives local shoppers a quick and simple-to-use resource to find what markets and vendors are near them.

A user can find a market by filtering region and/or days of the week they are open, as well as identify if they participate in SNAP or Double Up Food Bucks.

www.idahopreferred.com/products/farmers-markets/

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The **Idaho Preferred Farmers Market Directory** gives local shoppers a quick and simple-to-use resource to find what markets and vendors are near them.

A user can find a market by filtering region and/or days of the week they are open, as well as identify if they participate in SNAP or Double Up Food Bucks.

www.idahopreferred.com/community-supported-agriculture/

IDAHO PREFERRED'S GUIDES TO

The Egg Guide features Idaho Preferred members who raise and sell eggs across the state. This guide makes it easy to find fresh, local eggs while supporting Idaho farmers.

www.idahopreferred.com/products/eggs

The Idaho Lamb Guide highlights Idaho Preferred ranchers offering locally raised lamb. Use this guide to explore where to buy lamb directly from trusted Idaho producers.

www.idahopreferred.com/products/sheep/

American Farm Bureau Federation photo

For now, a $59 million grant awarded to the University of Idaho to help farmers implement "climate-smart" practices is canceled.

Future of $59 million U of I grant is uncertain

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

The future status of a $59 million grant University of Idaho received to help Idaho farmers implement "climate-smart" practices is uncertain.

The university had received applications from 201 Idaho agricultural producers who, through the grant, were hoping to work with UI researchers to address some resource-related issues.

They hope the grant is reinstated, even if it's in a somewhat different form.

But for now, it's canceled.

"It is terminated," said Sanford Eigenbrode, who was co-director of the project funded by the grant.

The grant, the largest in U of I history, would have funded the university's Innovative Agriculture and Marketing Partnership (IAMP) project.

Work on that project has ceased.

The IAMP project, according to a university news release, was "intended to provide payment directly to Idaho producers for developing sustainable agricultural practices."

USDA on April 14 announced the cancellation of the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities, which provided U of I's $59 million grant. The PCSC initiative was overhauled

into what USDA now calls the Markets for Producers initiative.

The ag department plans to reformulate the initiative to cut what it says was too much red tape and overhead. It also wants to award more grant money directly to ag producers.

According to USDA, the majority of the projects funded under the PCSC "had sky-high administration fees which in many instances provided less than half of the federal funding directly to farmers."

"Select projects may continue if it is demonstrated that a significant amount of the federal funds awarded will go to farmers," an April 14 USDA news release stated. "With this action, USDA is cutting bureaucratic red tape, streamlining reporting, lowering the paperwork burden on producers and putting farmers first."

The ag department encouraged partners, such as U of I, who had received grants under the prior initiative to ensure their projects are farmer-focused and re-apply.

USDA has identified changes under the new initiative that grant partners will have to meet. They include:

- A minimum of 65 percent of federal funds must go to producers.
- Grant recipients must have enrolled at least one producer as of Dec. 31, 2024.
- Grant recipients must have made a payment to at least one producer as of Dec. 31, 2024.

Grant recipients have until June 20 to reapply and will have to meet the new requirements.

According to the USDA news release, "Select projects may continue if it is demonstrated that a significant amount of the federal funds awarded will go to farmers. We continue to support farmers and encourage partners to ensure their projects are farmer focused or re-apply to continue work that is aligned with the priorities of this administration."

As of April 30, U of I officials were waiting for a call from USDA that would get the re-application process rolling.

Eigenbrode is confident the university can re-formulate the IAMP project to meet USDA's new criteria.

He said he saw no deal-breakers in the new criteria.

"I am confident" we can get the project going again, he said. "We are looking forward to it. It's doable."

Eigenbrode said regardless of changes in policy and vision between administrations over the years, the university has always had its eyes on the same prize: "We're here to support producers…"

Farmers who were on the verge of working with U of I researchers to implement practices in alignment with the IAMP project are left holding the bag for now.

Some of them had already spent a decent amount of money preparing to implement these practices and are in a sort of holding pattern, waiting to see if the grant and IAMP project continues.

According to its news release, USDA said it "will honor all eligible expenses incurred prior to April 13, 2025." However, some Idaho farmers who already spent money in anticipation of the IAMP project are not sure they will recoup most of that money.

Craigmont farmer Tom Mosman said his operation bought a $650,000 drill to accommodate practices the project wanted done.

"The way it stands now, I have no way of recouping that money," he said.

USDA's new criteria for these types of projects that seeks to provide more of the grant money directly to farmers is a good thing, Mosman said.

But he's more concerned about the grant itself, and the project it funds, coming back, than he is about the extra money producers might see under the new criteria.

That's because he was looking forward to working with U of I researchers to address some of the resource concerns in his region.

"We need to do this and we need the university's help on this," Mosman said.

Clint Zenner's 5,000-acre farm southeast of Genesee was the pilot for the IAMP project and Zenner implemented all of the practices project leaders wanted him to do last fall.

He was the first grower contracted with the IAMP project, and he bought a lot of compost in anticipation of it.

"I was supposedly going to get paid and then the grant got shut down," he said.

Zenner said there are a lot of resource concerns in his area and, like Mosman, he was looking forward to working with university researchers to try to address them through the IAMP project.

He's confident U of I will get the grant back and the project will proceed.

"We definitely need the university to keep … doing research like this," Zenner said.

Tom Conklin, who farms just south of Lewiston, had not yet spent money specifically on the IAMP project and plans on doing some of the practices anyway.

If the project comes back and offsets some of the costs of those practices, that would be helpful, he said.

"Grants like this are a good thing all around because they incentivize people who might not be ready to make that change to go ahead and make that change," Conklin said. "It would be great if that grant came back."

He said anything that can be done to incentivize farm practices that are a benefit to everybody is a bonus to everybody and projects like IAMP can help do that.

"There's a number of people up here making some pretty big changes in how they farm; that's happening no matter what," Conklin said. "At the end of the day, it's how do we get more people to do that?" ■

"Grants like this are a good thing all around because they incentivize people who might not be ready to make that change to go ahead and make that change."

— *Tom Conklin, Idaho farmer*

U of I tests drone for reseeding research ranch following wildfire

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

HAILEY – University of Idaho researchers hope to demonstrate that a large drone can be an effective tool for restoring wildfire-scorched rangeland in rugged and inaccessible locations.

Lightning sparked the Glendale Fire in the Wood River Valley on Sept. 2, 2024, burning sagebrush uplands, meadows and riparian areas, including the northern 2,000 acres of U of I's Rinker Rock Creek Ranch.

The research ranch is jointly managed by the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS) and the College of Natural Resources (CNR), with guidance from an advisory board that includes several key stakeholders.

U of I and partner organizations raised funding to have the federal Bureau of Land Management fly a helicopter and aerially seed 890 burned areas of the ranch last fall with a mixture of grasses and forbs.

Budgetary considerations limited the scope of the applications.

CALS and CNR have found a promising new seeding option in a 96-pound multicopter drone with a 9.5-foot diameter, which the two colleges recently purchased using a $75,000 donation from AgWest Farm Credit.

The drone, which has the capacity to apply seed and herbicides at a commercial scale, will be available for future research by either college, and plans are in the works to build a portable trailer with a launching pad and water and chemical tanks to support drone flights.

Tim Prather, a professor within the CALS Department of Plant Sciences and senior associate director of the Rangeland Center, is the lead on the restoration demonstration project, working

LEFT: **The Glendale fire can be seen burning from within Rinker Rock Creek Ranch.** Photos courtesy of Cameron Packero

The Glendale Fire burns through Cow Camp at University of Idaho's Rinker Rock Creek Ranch in Hailey.

with Jason Karl, a professor of rangeland ecology within CNR and director of the Rangeland Center.

"Almost everybody who has spray drones now is using them in a crop agriculture context, or maybe spraying some weeds generally, but I'm not aware of many people at all who are using drones in a post-fire restoration context," Karl said.

The researchers will assess stand establishment and weed density of treated areas this spring before planning which areas may require additional seeding or herbicide treatments using the drone heading forward.

They also plan to seed previously untreated burn areas with the drone this fall and winter.

Based on the large size of the drone, U of I had to register it as a standard aircraft and obtain a special exemption from the FAA to fly it. The university also had to apply for certification to dispense chemicals.

Karl and a couple of others with experience in drone technology are undergoing training to pilot it.

"The target of this kind of drone is areas where it would be difficult or impossible to get in with ground equipment that are also not great for getting aerial equipment in," Karl said. "This would allow you to do much more targeted applications."

They'll spend the summer figuring out the drone's operational constraints and parameters, such as the ideal height to fly it during applications, how to calibrate the spreader for different sizes of seed and how to most efficiently swap batteries and fill tanks.

The drone is equipped with radar technology, enabling it to fly at a constant, low elevation above the ground regardless of the type of terrain. Prather intends to study the droplet distribution of drone applications for comparison with spray applications using crop dusters, helicopters and backpack sprayers.

"I think this drone may have some ability to give us better coverage overall because we can hug the landscape," Prather said.

Another major benefit Prather envisions is that having access to the drone will allow the ranch to respond quickly to weed outbreaks, quashing them before they get out of hand.

The restoration project will use high-resolution satellite imagery taken before, during and after the fire to assess burn severity and determine restoration prescriptions.

The demonstration project and the imagery should help the researchers develop a "decision matrix" informing land managers about optimal conditions and circumstances for making applications.

"The nice thing about the drone is it allows us to not prioritize based on terrain," Prather said. "We can get to areas where we would not have been comfortable making applications with other equipment." ■

UI Extension studies economics of leaving straw in fields

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

MOSCOW, Idaho – University of Idaho Extension Educator Grant Loomis has noticed an increasing number of Blaine County farmers have been letting their straw rot in the field after grain harvest rather than baling and selling it.

A recently published UI Extension and U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperative study suggests there may be wisdom in the seemingly counterintuitive management approach.

The paper, "Understanding the Mineral and Nutrient Value of Wheat Residue," concludes nutrients in straw that growers leave in the field can be worth upward of two-thirds of the revenue obtained from harvesting that straw and selling the bales.

Baled straw is commonly purchased for uses including mushroom cultivation, insulation, making compost and animal bedding.

In addition to lending nutrient value, straw left in the field packs several agronomic benefits that are harder for growers to quantify, such as improving soil organic matter, bolstering soil microbial activity, curbing erosion and improving water infiltration into soil.

The straw study followed up on Loomis' 2017 master's thesis project, which was funded by the Idaho Barley Commission and evaluated the efficiency with which plants take up nitrogen when it is tilled into the soil versus broadcast on the surface.

Loomis and his colleagues found roughly a quarter to half of nitrogen applied in the study made its way into straw tissue, depending on crop variety and fertilizer application method.

"We saw there was nitrogen in the straw from what I did, and we had the question of what real value does that have to farmers of leaving that straw on the soil, incorporating it into their soil or taking it off and baling it," Loomis said.

Loomis was still a graduate student when he helped with data collection for straw-study field trials in 2018 and 2019. Other co-authors included Juliet Marshall, Patrick Hatzenbuehler, Biswanath Dari and Olga Walsh with U of I, and Curtis Adams, Christopher Rogers and David Tarkalson with USDA's Agricultural Research Service.

Their research was based on replicated trials at the U of I Aberdeen Research and Extension Center and commercial fields in Soda Springs, Rupert, Idaho Falls and Ashton.

Summaries of the key findings were published in the November and December 2024 edition of the American Society of Agronomy's "Crops & Soils" magazine.

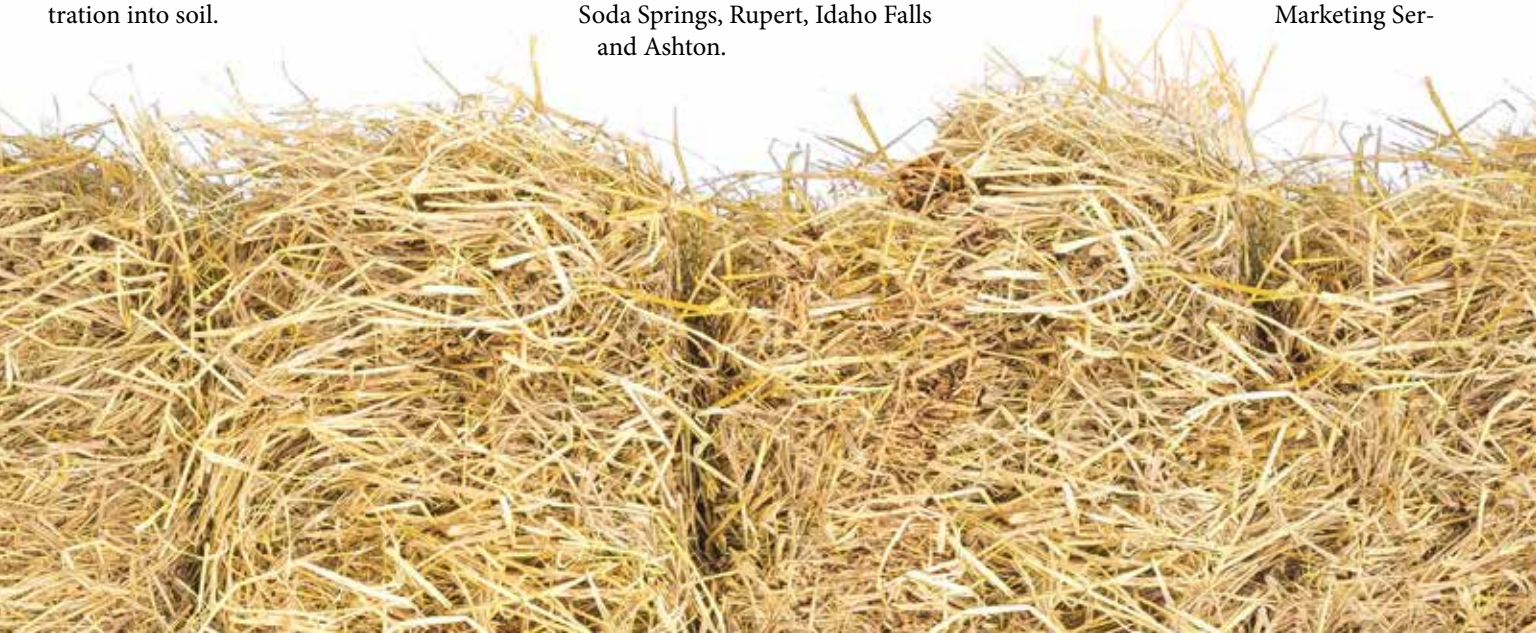
Based on an average yield of 120 bushels per acre of wheat, the researchers estimated the straw contained the equivalent of 38 pounds of nitrogen, 2 pounds of phosphorus and 201 pounds of potassium per acre.

"That was the question that was really unanswered before — it was unknown how much nutrients are in the straw," Hatzenbuehler said.

During 2023, Hatzenbuehler, an Extension specialist of agricultural economics, made economic calculations for the study, which he presented Feb. 5 during the East Idaho Cereals Conference hosted in Fort Hall.

Based on a wheat yield of 120 bushels per acre and using historical average nutrient prices, Hatzenbuehler estimated the value of nutrients in straw left as residue on fields at $77 per acre. Barley straw nutrient values were slightly less, at about $60 per acre.

By comparison, he calculated that farmers could make $122 per acre by selling wheat straw —assuming a straw price of $55 per ton, based on USDA Agricultural Marketing Ser-



"The value of keeping that straw on the farm rather than harvesting and selling it needs to be considered."

— Grant Loomis, UI Extension Educator

vice reports from January 2025, and an average yield of 2.47 tons of straw per acre from a 100-bushels-per-acre crop.

To determine the net profit from such a sale, one would need to account for the costs of baling, hauling, and selling the straw. Grain growers commonly hire contractors to bale and haul their straw, which cuts into profits from selling it.

Hatzenbuehler's estimates also did not factor in the value of micronutrients contained in straw, such as magnesium and sulfur, or soil-health benefits of leaving straw. USDA has begun research to answer questions about when nutrients from straw become available to crops.

Many farmers in southern Idaho have baled and sold straw for decades, which has depleted their soils of potassium. Some of the region's farmers have recently resorted to leaving straw on their fields as a means of replenishing their soil potassium.

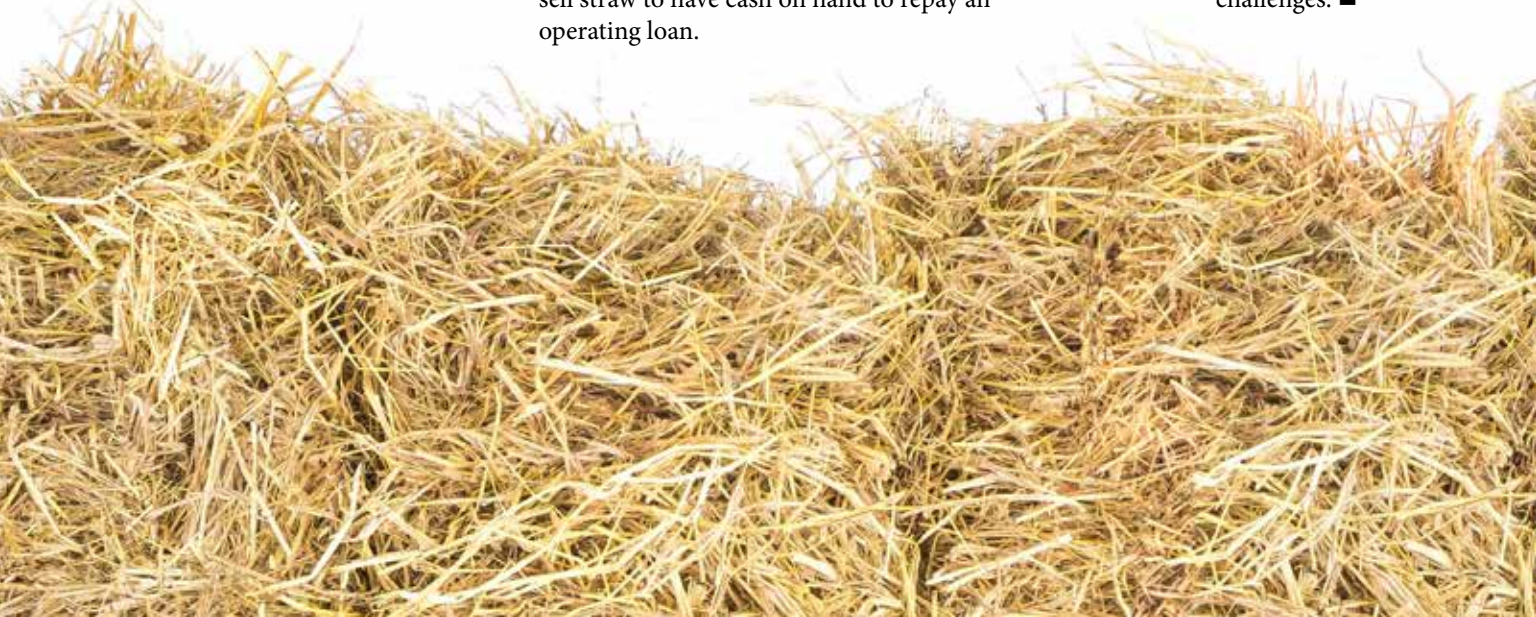
"This puts the spotlight on a potentially unfavorable long-term economic tradeoff," Loomis said. "The value of keeping that straw on the farm rather than harvesting and selling it needs to be considered."

Individual circumstances have a strong bearing on whether keeping or selling straw makes the most economic sense for a farmer. For example, a farmer may need to sell straw to have cash on hand to repay an operating loan.

Furthermore, farmers have less certainty regarding how long it may take for nutrients in straw to break down into a plant-available form.

Another potential pitfall of leaving straw in the field is the potential for it to harbor diseases and carry inoculum into the next growing season — a phenomenon plant pathologists describe as a "green bridge."

Diversifying crop rotations is a proven strategy toward avoiding such disease challenges. ■



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

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

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Episode 82 - Ag Journalist Paige Nelson

Paige Nelson didn't have the same class schedule as many of her fellow college journalism students. She came from preg-checking cows in her advanced beef reproduction class and smelled like manure, but she was determined to be an agriculture journalist.

In this podcast, Paige tells stories of how her upbringing has led to a life as a mom, rancher, and freelance agriculture writer. She has a message for anyone who says, "I am just a farmer or rancher."