

Blue Jackets Swarm Capitol



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The heartbeat of Farm Bureau: County presidents

Over this past year, I dedicated extra time to celebrating our county presidents because they are the very heartbeat of our mighty federation.

Of course, it takes all of us working together across agriculture and across Farm Bureau—from the local, state, and national level—to ensure a brighter future for our farms, ranches and rural communities.

But county presidents don't often step into the spotlight. Our state and national leaders and staff all know how hard our local leaders and volunteers work, though. That's why I de-

clared this past year: "The Year of the County President."

I have traveled to visit with county leaders across the country and hosted a special set of virtual townhall meetings just for our county presidents. We capped off this celebration at the 2025 American Farm Bureau Convention in San Antonio in January. We hosted a special gathering for county presidents at the convention, and spotlighted local leaders from across the country.

See **DUVALL**, page 6

The President's Desk

By **Bryan Searle**

President, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



'We are stronger together'

The goal of Idaho Farm Bureau Federation's annual Legislative Conference has always been to provide our members a chance to mingle with lawmakers in an informal setting and talk issues or just get to know them.

This two-day event, known officially as the Legislative and Issue Advisory Conference, has also become an opportunity to meet with members of other farm and ranch groups and do the same thing.

Once again, IFBF invited members of other

agricultural groups to not only attend the event, but to address our members. And it wasn't just one or two ag organizations that were invited.

Farm Bureau members were able to hear directly from representatives of some of the other ag commodities they might not otherwise get the chance to hear from, including the wine, hop, sugar beet, cherry, apple, onion, horse and forestry industries.

See **SEARLE**, page 7

Inside Farm Bureau

By **Zak Miller**

CEO, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



The paradox of independent dependence

The rugged individualism of Idaho agriculture runs as deep as the Snake River Canyon, yet it contains an intriguing paradox.

I often reflect on my ancestors who saw a barren desert filled with sand and sagebrush and envisioned rich, fertile farms. Would I have possessed the same determination to strive for that kind of existence?

When reflecting on the dedication it took to pursue their dreams, it is astonishing to realize that each individual farmer, despite

the immense effort involved in realizing those dreams, understood that farming in Idaho's arid desert required irrigation water.

Developing water infrastructure in Idaho was a challenge that no independent farmer could tackle alone.

Farmers needed to collaborate with their neighbors to build the systems necessary for delivering precious water to their farms, which was essential for their individual and community survival.

See **MILLER**, page 6



Idaho Farm Bureau.

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MAGAZINE CONTACTS:

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation
EDITOR (208) 239-4292 • ADS (208) 239-4384
E-MAIL: seanellis@idahofb.org
ADS: advertising@idahofb.org
web: www.idahofb.org



Photos by Sean Ellis

In his State of the State address, Gov. Brad Little applauded farmers for getting together and resolving a major water dispute.

Governor applauds farmers in State of the State

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE – In his State of the State address Jan. 6, Gov. Brad Little gave a shout-out to the state’s farmers for solving a major water dispute themselves before it got out of control and harmed the state’s agriculture industry.

Facing a potential water calamity involving the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer this past growing season, Idaho farmers who pump groundwater and those who get their irrigation from surface water got together and hashed out a new agreement that benefits both sides.

Left unsolved, the water dispute could have potentially led to hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland along the ESPA without water.

Instead, farmers from both sides of the issue sat down together and hashed out an agreement after lengthy, contentious discussions.

The governor, a farmer and rancher himself, applauded them for that.

See ADDRESS, page 15

COVER: FFA students from across Idaho converged on the Capitol to learn first-hand how the legislative process works. See story on page 4. Submitted photo

Wave of blue jackets swarms Idaho Capitol

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



BOISE – Hundreds of FFA students from across the state mingled with legislators, statewide elected officials and farm industry leaders Jan. 27 during the annual Cenarrusa “Day on the Hill” luncheon.

The luncheon kicks off a two-day event that brings hundreds of Idaho FFA members to Boise.

A wave of FFA students wearing their iconic blue jackets descends on the Capitol to meet with lawmakers and experience first-hand how Idaho government works.

They also have opportunities to mingle with and hear from ag industry leaders.

FFA is a career and technical education student organization that aims to make a positive difference in students’ lives by developing their potential for leadership and career success through agricultural education.

“This is such an impressive group of young people,” Idaho State Department of Agriculture Director Chanel Tewalt said during the luncheon, which was attended by more than 400 people. “They are going to do amazing things in agriculture.”

FFA is an unmatched youth organization, added Tewalt, who grew up on a livestock operation and is a former FFA student herself.

“When I meet FFA students or when they come to work for us, they are always the most prepared and articulate people,” she told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation before the event started. “This is such an incredible, pivotal organization that prepares people well.”

Lt. Gov. Scott Bedke, a rancher from Oakley, attended the Cenarrusa luncheon and told IFBF later that he remembers visiting the Capitol during this event as an FFA member.

Bedke, the former Idaho Speaker of the House, called that FFA experience “absolutely valuable.”

He said he has learned from the business community that if a job applicant has a solid FFA background, “they go straight to the top of the resume pile. I don’t know that you can replace that” type of experience.

“These students are showing up in very, very prominent leadership positions for our industry.”

– Sid Freeman, Canyon County farmer

Canyon County farmer Sid Freeman, a longtime Idaho FFA supporter who started the organization’s tractor raffle program, said that in just the past year, he has worked with several former FFA students who are now serving in important leadership positions in the ag industry.

“These students are showing up in very, very prominent leadership positions for our industry,” he said.

One of the main focuses of the annual FFA event is to provide students with an opportunity to experience first-hand how public policy is developed during the legislative process.

It also allows FFA members to establish a relationship with their elected representatives and talk about agricultural and other issues.

“You just can’t put a value on that,” Freeman said.

The luncheon is named for former Idaho Secretary of State Pete Cenarrusa, who died in 2013 and whose 51 years in the legislative and executive branches of Idaho government make him the longest-serving public servant in state history.

Cenarrusa started the first ag classes at Cambridge and Carey high schools and was known as a champion of Idaho agriculture.

The Northwest Agricultural Cooperative Council, the main sponsor of the luncheon, presented friend of the industry awards to Sen. Julie VanOrden, R-Pingree, and Rep. Judy Boyle, R-Midvale.

Honorary FFA degrees for their long-time support of Idaho FFA and agricultural education were presented to Sen. David Lent, R-Idaho Falls, and Rep. Lori McCann, R-Lewiston. ■

OPPOSITE PAGE: Hundreds of FFA members from throughout Idaho mingled with legislators, statewide elected officials and farm industry leaders Jan. 27 during the annual Cenarrusa “Day on the Hill” luncheon. Photos by Sean Ellis

LEFT: Lt. Gov. Scott Bedke, right, and other elected officials and industry leaders mingled with hundreds of FFA students from across Idaho during their annual descent on the Capitol.



DUVALL

Continued from page 2

Having an impact and making a real difference begins at the local level. Farm Bureau is the trusted Voice of Agriculture and the leading grassroots membership organization advocating for all farmers, ranchers and rural communities, and our county leaders are leading the way in their communities.

I've had the privilege of seeing firsthand some of the remarkable things happening across our country, driven by our county Farm Bureaus.

I shared just a few examples of what this leadership looks like during our opening session at the convention in San Antonio, and I'd love to share these stories with our entire Farm Bureau family.

Keep in mind, these are just a few of the thousands of stories we could share, and I hope these stories will inspire you and encourage you to lift up the work your county leaders are doing every day.

In the Southern region, Megan DeHart from Mercer County, Kentucky, took her county to new heights with a social media campaign, #365DaysOfMercerCountyAg.

Every day they showcased the faces and families behind local agriculture. The campaign was a big success and helped members of the community feel closer to

farmers just down the road.

Megan also found a way to connect Farm Bureau to underserved populations. She planted gardens at local rehab facilities and retirement homes to bring the joy of farming to those who couldn't come to the farm.

In the Northeast, Stewart Ramsey of New Castle County, Delaware, is a driving force for agriculture. He led efforts to reduce property taxes on farm structures, saving farmers thousands of dollars, and he is investing in the next generation.

Stewart coordinates with local school districts to bring students to his farm to learn where their food comes from. On top of all that, he has found creative ways to connect his urban neighbors with local agriculture. New Castle County Farm Bureau hosts community events like a Milk Run 5K and a Beef and Beer Fundraiser, which raised more than \$15,000 last year.

In the Midwest, Heather Mentzer of Allen County, Kansas, has been on a mission to refocus her county's advocacy and membership efforts. She created a survey to get input from her members on state-wide issues and successfully drew them in to be more actively engaged.

Heather also organized a County Legislative Coffee to connect farmers with state legislators, leading to many other conver-

sations and meetings. She has also reached beyond her fencerows, joining with other community organizations to become a force for good.

Under Heather's leadership, Allen County Farm Bureau sponsored events to strengthen mental wellness and ensure no one feels alone.

Out in the West, Mark Lopez from Orange County, California, is the mastermind behind a transformative effort in his community. He led his county Farm Bureau to create nine farmers markets to bring fresh produce to several communities.

Orange County Farm Bureau has donated over \$3 million to local youth ag education programs. They have also set up several educational scholarships and donated another \$100,000 to their local FFA chapter. That's millions of dollars raised by one county Farm Bureau and invested in the community.

These leaders—along with all our county presidents—inspire me, and I hope they inspire you too.

I hope you'll join me in applauding our county presidents year-round for how they are stepping up from sea to shining sea to drive Farm Bureau forward as the premier organization in their communities. ■

MILLER

Continued from page 2

This illustrates the paradox of independent dependence.

Just as our ancestors came together to build essential water infrastructure, today's farmers must unite to protect and preserve these precious resources for future generations.

Through collaboration with our state and other stakeholders, Idaho must continue to invest in enhancing our natural resources, ensuring that our citizens can thrive in our desert environment.

The collective efforts that went into digging our canals in the past must be matched today by expanding our aquifer recharge, increasing water storage, automating water delivery, and committing to water conservation—whether for large farms or individual homes in subdivisions.

One of the pressing challenges facing today's farmers is the growing disconnect between most Americans and agriculture.

Farmers must work both independently and collaboratively

to demonstrate, through their words and actions, that American-grown food—especially from Idaho—remains the safest and best choice for consumers.

This mission requires the same pioneering spirit that established our agricultural foundation, now focused on education and advocacy.

Success in this endeavor relies on farmers and ranchers dedicating some of their time to advocate for and educate the public about agriculture, just as those in the past invested their efforts in building the canals that nourished their farms and communities.

The collaboration goes beyond just irrigation and educating consumers. Idaho's agricultural independence has consistently relied on interdependent relationships with researchers from the University of Idaho, marketing groups that assist farmers in accessing larger markets, and community-based organizations that share equipment and expertise.

Even the most independent organic farmers depend on certification agencies, while ranchers rely on grazing associations and access to shared federal and state lands.

A unique paradigm emerges in Idaho: an independence that paradoxically depends on trust and collaboration.

The state's agricultural community illustrates this, where fiercely independent farmers voluntarily unite to achieve common goals while retaining operational autonomy.

As Idaho agriculture faces new challenges, finding a balance between independence and interdependence is becoming increasingly important.

The success of Idaho's agricultural sector relies heavily on independent farmers who are willing to make bold decisions

while also engaging in collaborative networks that support those choices.

In Idaho's agricultural community, true independence does not mean standing alone; it involves coming together while preserving individual identity and autonomy.

This unique blend of self-reliance and mutual support is not a contradiction; it is the foundation that has enabled Idaho agriculture to be resilient and prosperous for generations.

Maintaining this balance will be essential for preserving our agricultural heritage for the future and for upholding the more profound meaning of independent dependence that has always made our state so special. ■

SEARLE

Continued from page 2

For some Farm Bureau members who attended the conference, I suspect it was their first time hearing directly from members of some commodities.

And vice versa. It was likely the first time some of these commodities' representatives had the opportunity to interact directly with Farm Bureau members.

This interaction with representatives of other commodity groups was well received, on both sides.

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation is known as the Voice of Idaho Agriculture and it's only proper that we welcome, with open arms, members of all Idaho ag commodities. We continue to work harder to unite together, knowing that "we are stronger together."

Farm Bureau has always reached out to and worked with other farm groups, but this time more of them had the opportunity to directly address our members at the Legislative Conference.

If we didn't hear from other ag groups and understand their issues, we would run the risk of not truly speaking for all of Idaho agriculture.

During the conference, our issue advisory committees had a chance to meet together to discuss the issues at hand and have others address the committee concerning those things that are of concern to them.

Whether it's producers from a small crop or from producers representing the biggest commodity in the state, we have to

'If we didn't hear from other ag groups and understand their issues, we would run the risk of not truly speaking for all of Idaho agriculture.'

hear from every sector of the agriculture community so that we can truly wear that mantle of the Voice of Idaho Agriculture.

[See page 16 for a story on the Legislative Conference.]

As always, members of Idaho's congressional delegation addressed conference attendees by video conference, updated them on important issues and fielded questions.

Typical of the comments from the delegation was this one from Rep. Russ Fulcher: "I've always enjoyed, since I was in the legislature, working with Farm Bureau."

We thank our delegation not just for taking the time to chat with grassroots Farm Bureau members, but for their willingness in working with IFBF on issues important to our industry and state.

Representatives of Idaho departments that have important interactions with agriculture also attended this year's event, which took place Feb. 11-12 in Boise.

Representatives of Idaho's agriculture, fish and game, environmental quality, and lands departments addressed participants and fielded questions.

Of course, the highlight of the conference is the "legislative dinner," which mixes lawmakers with Farm Bureau

members and other agricultural industry leaders. There is no program or agenda for the dinner.

This informal setting allows legislators and Farm Bureau members to sit down at dinner together and speak freely about issues and get to know one another personally. You almost can't put a value on that type of atmosphere.

Many legislators have told us over the years this relaxed legislative dinner is one of the very top highlights of their year.

The morning of the second day, our members were able to go the Capitol and attend a committee of their choice, hear presentations on important issues, and then sit in on either the House or Senate sessions.

They were able to see and hear our elected officials debate various pieces of legislation. This is another opportunity to build a strong relationship with our elected officials and share our members' policy.

We thank everyone who attended this year's Legislative Conference and look forward to a continued partnership and relationship with other ag groups and our elected officials. Once again, it can't be said enough: "We are stronger together." ■



Wheat is harvested in an East Idaho field in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo.

Wheat is top crop in the PNW, in total acres

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – In terms of total acres, wheat is the No. 1 crop in the Pacific Northwest states of Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

In those three PNW states combined, there were 4.25 million planted wheat acres in 2024, according to USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service.

“Wheat is a big crop in the Pacific Northwest,” says Britany Hurst Marchant, executive director of the Idaho Wheat Commis-

sion, which represents the state's roughly 2,600 wheat farmers.

The No. 2 crop in those three states in 2024 in terms of total acres was hay with 2.8 million planted acres, followed by corn (655,000 acres), barley (641,000 acres) and potatoes (518,000) acres.

Idaho farmers typically grow about 1.2 million acres of wheat each year and it's grown in 42 of the state's 44 counties. Idaho

“Whether you grow sugar beets, potatoes or something else, there is wheat somewhere in your rotation.”

– Cory Kress, Rockland farmer

wheat yields per acre are consistently among the highest in the nation.

“The state of Idaho knows how to grow wheat,” says North Idaho wheat farmer Bill Flory. “There are counties (in the state) where it is THE main crop.”

Idaho typically ranks between No. 5 and 7 in the nation in total wheat production, “but when it comes to consistent quality and overall yields across the state, we’re at the top of the heap,” he says.

Idaho is one of the few states that grows five of the six classes of wheat and Idaho is known by grain customers for its consistent supply of high-quality wheat, according to Marchant.

“We grow very consistent, very high-quality wheat, especially our soft white wheat,” she said. “But, really, all five classes of the wheat that we grow are very consistent in quantity and quality.”

The state’s wheat farmers typically produce about 100 million bushels per year.

“We usually have super consistent quality and quantity; our customers love PNW wheat,” says Rockland farmer Cory Kress. “It’s always top-notch and we’re pretty consistently around that 100-million-bushel mark.”

Idaho has very predictable weather patterns compared to other areas of the country and the cool nights and warm days are ideal for the state’s wheat crop, says IWC chairman Wayne Hurst, who formerly served as president of the National Association of Wheat Growers.

Add in a stable supply of water and “that’s what makes Idaho a great wheat-growing state,” he says. “It allows the state’s farmers to produce a steady, consistent, stable wheat crop year after year.”

While total U.S. wheat production has declined substantially over the past 40 years, Idaho production has remained fairly stable. That has a lot to do with wheat’s importance in Idaho as a rotation crop.

It is often planted after some of Idaho’s cash crops, such as potatoes and sugar beets, to help improve soil health.

“Whatever you grow, wheat is a great rotation crop,” Kress says.

He said wheat improves organic matter in a field and helps improve soil health and structure.

“It is a great agronomic fix,” Kress says. “Whether you grow sugar beets, potatoes or something else, there is wheat somewhere in your rotation.”

Hurst grows a variety of crops on his farm, including potatoes, beans and sugar beets.

“Wheat is really the king of soil health on my farm,” he says. “Wheat is the crop I always go back to to maintain a healthy soil.”



A wheat field is shown in southwestern Idaho in this Idaho Farm Bureau file photo.

Wheat puts high levels of straw and organic matter into the soil, says North Idaho farmer Bill Flory.

“Wheat is extremely important for soil health,” he says.

Wheat is sort of a “quiet” crop that doesn’t get a lot of notoriety, Hurst says. “But wheat is a very important foundation for a healthy agriculture.”

According to the wheat commission, half of Idaho’s wheat crop goes to domestic mills and the other half is exported, mainly through the Port of Portland, to customers in Asia and Latin America.

The Port of Lewiston in Idaho and Columbia-Snake River system, which allows Idaho wheat to be shipped to Portland by barge, is very important to ensure quick and timely delivery, particularly to customers in Asia, Marchant says.

“It gets there when we say it’s going to get there. It’s always on time,” she says.

Because wheat plays such a major role in Idaho and the PNW, the region has a large amount of infrastructure in support of that industry.

That includes:

- 16 wheat breeding programs.
- 4 wheat geneticists.
- 50-plus support staff, not including pathologists, entomologists or agronomists.
- Six wheat quality labs.
- Well over 100 wheat trial sites and more than 100,000 test plots.

The wheat industry in the PNW is also supported by a large amount of other resources, including the PNW Wheat Quality Council, the National Small Grains Collection, USDA’s Agricultural Research Service Wheat Genomics Program and the Wheat Marketing Center. ■

Idaho’s NASS field office provided the PNW acreage totals included in this story.



This is an artist's rendering of the new Idaho Wheat Commission building being built in downtown Boise.

Wheat commission moves forward on new building

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE – The plan to construct a new Idaho Wheat Commission building, discussed and planned for years, is no longer in a holding pattern.

IWC officials are moving ahead with plans for a new, \$14 million Idaho Wheat and Ag Center, as the building is called.

The old building was razed in December. Construction on the new building is set for this spring and it is expected to be completed in spring 2026.

The new building, at 31,000 square feet, will be almost four times bigger than the old building.

The wheat commission, which used to pay rent for a space in the Owyhee Plaza in downtown Boise, purchased its current building at 821 W. State Street, one block from the Idaho Capitol building, for \$1.2 million in 2003.

The old building, which was built in 1945, had reached a point where significant investments were needed to maintain it, said

IWC Executive Director Britany Hurst Marchant.

“It had just reached a point where significant investment was necessary just to maintain the functionality and to update heating, cooling, wiring and safety components of the building,” she said. “After evaluating all of the options, it was just very clear that a new building was the most fiscally responsible way to go to meet the needs and objectives of the Idaho Wheat Commission and to be responsible stewards of wheat growers’ dollars.”

“We just needed to build a new building,” said Rockland farmer and IWC member Cory Kress. “We decided to maximize our space availability and build it as big as we could.”

Besides the wheat commission, tenants of the recently razed building included the Idaho Barley Commission, Idaho Grain Producers Association, Idaho Wine Commission, Idaho Bean Commission, Milk Producers of Idaho and leading staff from the University of Idaho’s College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.

Since 2003, the building basically served as a brain hub of Idaho agriculture, especially during the legislative session, when Food Producers of Idaho, which represents about 40 of the state’s main

agricultural organizations, met there weekly to discuss various pieces of legislation that could impact the state's agricultural industry.

"The old building has served us and the industry very well and I look forward to the new building," said North Idaho wheat farmer and former IWC Commissioner Bill Flory. "It's a meeting place for the industry and the wheat commission has always been generous with meeting space."

Marchant hopes the synergy created with other ag groups continues with the new building.

"Having that collaboration and camaraderie between each of the groups is so valuable," she said. "We have the same issues in a lot of ways and we may approach those differently, but we're all working toward, ultimately, the same end goal."

The new, four-story building will house several ag commodity groups, like the old building did.

The ground floor will be at least partially retail or "active use," which means people come in and out frequently. The second and third floors will be offices and the top floor will be meeting space.

"Everything's bigger," including meeting rooms, Marchant said. "We increased the size of the meeting rooms and added more meeting rooms. We'll have three different sizes of meeting space in the new building so it can accommodate large groups, medium-sized groups, and smaller groups."

The idea of a new Idaho Wheat Commission building has been talked about for quite some time and was delayed for various reasons, including COVID-19.

Marchant said the commission looked at the option to buy or move to a new location, but the current location right next to the Capitol building was the deciding factor.

"It's important to Idaho wheat producers, and others in Idaho agriculture, that we maintain the proximity to the Capitol building and facilitate those interactions with state representatives, officials and lawmakers," she said. "And that location is an important reminder of the legacy and the contributions that agriculture has made to Idaho's economy and heritage."

"Obviously, you couldn't ask for a better location for Idaho agriculture," said Kress. ■



Idaho Wheat Commission photo

This photo was taken right before the Idaho Wheat Commission building in downtown Boise was razed to the ground to make way for a new, four-story building.

Foreign footprints: Trends in U.S. agricultural land ownership

By **Daniel Munch**
AFBF Economist

Foreign ownership of U.S. agricultural land, which includes timberland, remains a widely debated and often controversial topic, fueled by concerns about the implications of foreign investments — especially those from nations viewed as adversarial to the U.S.

Since our previous analysis, Foreign Investment in U.S. Ag Land – The Latest Numbers, two additional years of data — 2022 and 2023 — have become available.

This article updates the trends in foreign ownership, revealing a 1.58-million-acre increase in foreign-held agricultural land between 2022 and 2023, driven primarily by investments linked to renewable energy projects. At the same time, the data shows a decrease in acreage owned by Chinese-based entities, reflecting shifting patterns in foreign land acquisition.

Background

The Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act of 1978 (AFIDA) requires foreign entities to report purchases, sales and interests in U.S. agricultural land to USDA via Form-153 submitted to the Farm Service Agency. It defines foreign entities broadly, including individuals, companies and even foreign governments, but excludes U.S. citizens and green card holders.

Non-compliance can result in fines up to 25% of the land's market value, though USDA has largely depended on voluntary self-reporting for its data.

In 2024, under heightened congressional scrutiny, USDA imposed a record \$1.2 million in penalties, including \$13,374 for non-filings and the remainder for late filings. While these penalties remain modest relative to USDA's full enforcement authority, they mark progress in strengthening oversight and compliance under AFIDA.

Additionally, 2023 saw a record number of AFIDA reports filed since the program's inception, with filings increasing by 5% compared to 2022. Of the 2,095 additional reports, 1,686 were tied to unique 2023 acquisitions, while 409 detailed transactions from prior years that likely should have been reported earlier. This

surge in reporting may reflect growing public and congressional focus on foreign ownership of U.S. agricultural land.

Summary of data

According to USDA's latest AFIDA report, 45.85 million acres of U.S. agricultural land were held by foreign investors in 2023, which represents 3.61% of total privately held agricultural land in the United States.

This marks a 1.58-million-acre (3.6%) increase from 2022 and a 5-million-acre (12.2%) rise since our prior analysis based on 2021 data. Canadian investors own the largest portion of foreign-held U.S. agricultural land with 33.5% (15.35 million acres) of the total and 1.21% of all U.S. agricultural land.

Following Canada, investors from the Netherlands, Italy, the United Kingdom and Germany own 0.41% (5.2 million acres), 0.22% (2.7 million acres), 0.11% (2.6 million acres) and 0.20% (2.5 million acres) of U.S. agricultural land, respectively. Figure 2 further breaks down foreign-investor-held land by predominant origin nation.

Since 2010, reported foreign-held agricultural land in the U.S. has grown by 21 million acres — an 85% increase — averaging an annual gain of 1.62 million acres.

This expansion, equivalent to an area larger than the state of South Carolina, has raised foreign ownership from 2% to 3.6% of all privately held agricultural land in the country.

In 2023, 48% (21.9 million acres) of reported foreign-held agricultural land was forestland, 29% (13.2 million acres) was cropland, 17% (7.7 million acres) was pastureland and 6% (2.9 million acres) was other agricultural land and non-ag land, which accounts for factors like owner or worker housing and rural roads.

Between 2018 and 2023, foreign investments in U.S. agricultural land have seen growth across all categories: a 101% increase in cropland, 28% in forestland, 15% in pastureland and 38% in other agricultural land. This reveals heightened interest by foreign investors in cropland as opposed to other land categories.

By state, Texas has the largest quantity of foreign-held U.S. agricultural land at 5.7 million acres, making up 3.6% of the state's 158 million acres of privately held agricultural land.

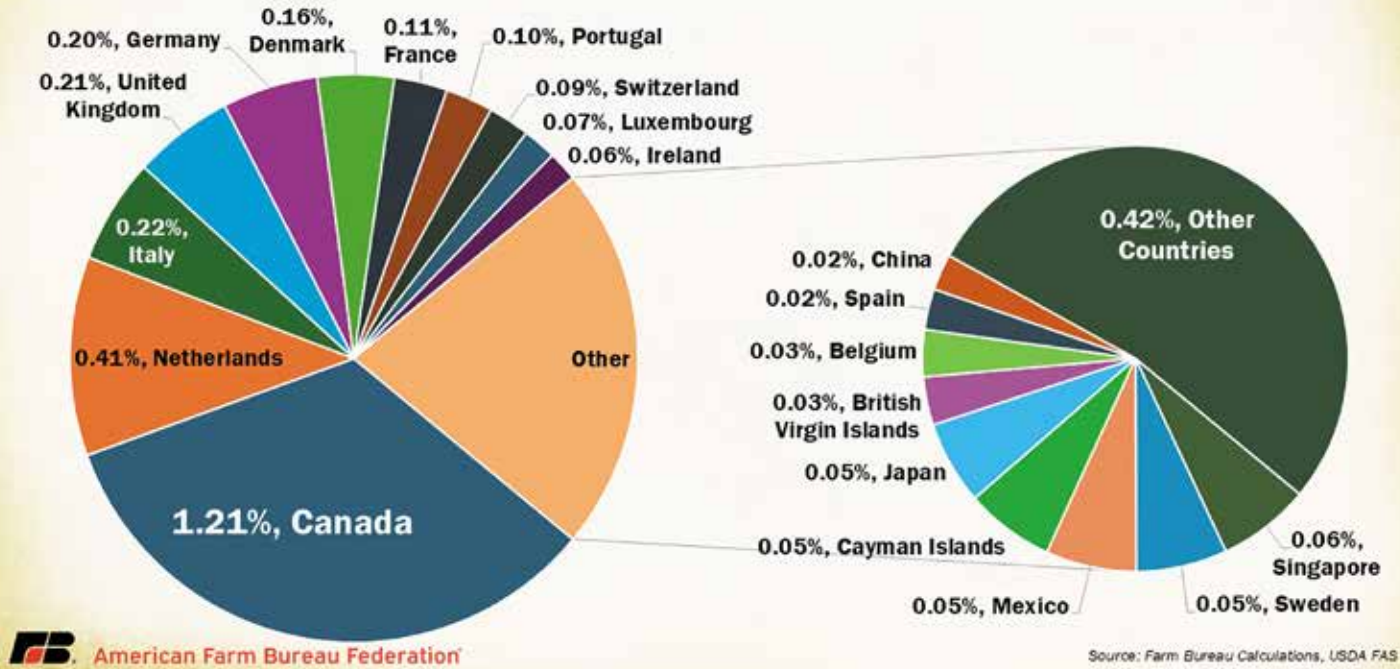
Maine has the second-largest quantity of foreign-held U.S. agri-

U.S. Agricultural Land Ownership by Investors From Nations Considered Adversarial (Department of Commerce)									
Country	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	YOY Change
China	246,543	246,966	247,216	247,268	352,140	383,935	311,608	277,336	-11%
Venezuela*	86,932	88,634	88,698	88,698	89,618	89,778	90,301	90,291	0%
Iran	4,324	4,324	4,324	4,324	4,324	4,324	4,355	3,030	-30%
Russia	834	834	834	834	834	73	63	11	-83%
Cuba	58	58	58	58	858	858	58	58	0%
Grand Total	338,691	340,816	341,130	341,183	447,774	478,968	406,385	370,726	-9%

*Only Politician Nicolas Maduro is recognized as adversarial. Venezuela data included for informational purposes

FIGURE 2: FOREIGN-OWNED U.S. AG LAND AS A PERCENT OF TOTAL U.S. AG LAND BY INVESTOR COUNTRY | 2023

Canada, the Netherlands, Italy, the UK and Germany account for 62% of U.S. ag land owned by foreign investors.



cultural land at 3.5 million acres but leads for highest proportion of foreign-held ag acreage with over 21% of the state's 16.5 million acres of ag land being held by foreign investors.

In both Texas and Maine, foreign ownership is primarily driven by forest products and timber companies. Hawaii also has a significant share of foreign-owned agricultural land, with 17% (283,000 of its 1.6 million agricultural acres) largely tied to renewable energy investments.

Forty-two states saw increases in foreign-owned ag land, led by New Mexico (+358,149 acres), Texas (+223,165 acres), Arkansas (+182,955 acres), Oregon (+167,108 acres) and South Carolina (+84,708 acres).

Growth in New Mexico and Texas is primarily tied to new or expanded wind energy investments, while increases in Arkansas, Oregon and South Carolina are largely linked to timber industry expansions. Hawaii experienced the largest year-over-year percentage increase, with a 33% jump in foreign-held land, driven by wind energy projects.

Meanwhile, three states — Alaska, Connecticut and Rhode Island — along with Puerto Rico, had no change in foreign-owned acreage. Five states — Alabama, Michigan, Indiana, Montana and Iowa — experienced declines, with Alabama recording the largest numerical decrease (-158,068 acres) and percentage drop (-7%), primarily due to reduced holdings by foreign timber companies.

Renewable energy production driving foreign investments

Under AFIDA, foreign investments in U.S. agricultural land include long-term leases of 10 years or more. This provision is

particularly relevant for renewable energy companies, many of which, especially foreign entities, secure land through extended leases rather than outright purchases. This approach provides access to large tracts of land for projects like wind farms and solar arrays while minimizing the financial burden of ownership.

While AFIDA data does not specify the exact purpose of each foreign land acquisition, certain terms in the names of reporting entities — such as “wind,” “solar,” “energy” and “renewable” — can serve as proxies for identifying renewable energy-focused companies.

This analysis estimates the extent of foreign interest in U.S. agricultural land for renewable energy development over time by aggregating the acreage associated with these terms.

Canadian investors accounted for the largest share at 5.5 million acres, followed by Italian investors with 2.57 million acres and Portuguese investors with 1.2 million acres.

Notably, of the top 10 nations in this category, only one — Australia — is located outside Europe, reflecting the region's commitment to renewable energy development and compliance with government mandates for carbon emissions reductions, which likely drive these investments.

In 2023, over 70% of the acreage linked to renewable energy companies was cropland, with 22% classified as pastureland, 6% as other agricultural land, and the remaining 2% as forestland. Breaking it down by keyword associations in entity names, 11.21 million acres (84%) were linked to entities containing the term “wind”; 4.8 million acres (36%) to entities with “energy”; 1.47 million acres (11%) to those with “solar”; and 404,000 acres (3%)

to entities with "renewable."

It is important to note that some entity names include multiple terms, leading to an overlap in these values.

Since 2010, foreign renewable energy investments in U.S. agricultural land have increased by at least 10.4 million acres — a 353% rise, accounting for nearly half of the 21-million-acre total increase in foreign-owned ag land during this period.

From 2018 to 2023, this trend has intensified, with renewable energy entities driving 76% of the total growth in foreign-owned agricultural land, contributing 7.55 million acres out of the 9.96-million-acre increase. Between 2022 and 2023 alone, entities with renewable energy-related terms in their names accounted for 54% of the 1.58-million-acre increase.

It's important to note that these figures represent minimum estimates, as not all renewable energy companies are captured through these specific terms.

These trends highlight renewable energy investment as a major driver of the increasing foreign interest in U.S. agricultural land.

The use of agricultural land for wind and solar energy production is a contentious topic, often sparking debates over whether it removes prime farmland from production or upholds landowners' rights to use, sell or lease their property as they choose.

As corporations face mounting pressure to meet environmental goals, investments in land for renewable energy projects are likely to continue.

Many European nations, which have some of the strictest carbon offset mandates, are constrained by limited available land, driving their investors toward stable countries like the U.S., where an abundance of open land provides potential for such projects.

The National security factor

Concerns about foreign ownership of U.S. agricultural land often focus on nations considered adversarial to the U.S.

The Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) within the Department of Commerce plays a critical role in regulating sensitive technologies, telecommunications and supply chain security as part of national security efforts.

In its most recent determination of foreign adversaries, the BIS identified the following governments or foreign non-governmental entities: The People's Republic of China, Republic of Cuba, Islamic Republic of Iran, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), Russian Federation and Venezuelan politician Nicolás Maduro.

The data highlights foreign-held acreage associated with investors from five of these nations, excluding North Korea, which holds no U.S. agricultural land. Together, these investors own 370,727 acres, representing three hundredths of 1% (0.03%) of all privately held agricultural land in the U.S. — roughly the size of an average county in Ohio.

From 2022 to 2023, acreage linked to Russian investors declined

As foreign investment in U.S. agricultural land continues to grow and diversify, improving analysis and enforcement will remain critical to ensuring both economic and security considerations are effectively addressed.'

by 52 acres (-83%), Iranian investors by 1,325 acres (-30%), and Chinese investors by 34,272 acres (-11%), while acreage linked to Venezuelan and Cuban investors remained unchanged.

There has been significant interest in U.S. agricultural land owned by Chinese investors. In 2023, 277,336 acres were linked to Chinese investors — 0.02% of all privately held U.S. agricultural land. This marks a 106,599-

acre (27%) decline from the 2021 peak of 383,935 acres.

The increase observed between 2012 and 2013 is primarily tied to the acquisition of a U.S.-based meat processing company, which now accounts for nearly half of all Chinese investor-held acreage.

The subsequent decline between 2021 and 2023 stems from two key factors: a reduction in holdings by a Chinese billionaire who had invested in southwest Texas for a renewable energy project, and the USDA's reclassification of acreage originally attributed to Chinese investors but later confirmed to be owned by a U.S. land asset management company with operations in Chinese markets.

Between 2022 and 2023, Chinese investors held at least 1 acre of agricultural land in 147 counties across the U.S., out of 3,244 total counties and county equivalents. Of these, 38 counties experienced a decline in Chinese investor-owned acreage, with 29 counties seeing a 100% reduction in holdings.

Conversely, 10 counties recorded an increase in Chinese investor-owned acreage, while the remaining 99 counties saw no change.

Conclusion

Foreign ownership of U.S. agricultural land continues to be a complex and closely watched issue. The latest AFIDA data highlights an increase in foreign-held acreage, driven largely by renewable energy investments from European entities, while also reflecting declines in ownership by investors from nations like China, Iran and Russia.

The data reaffirms the majority of land is owned by investors from nations considered friendly to the U.S., though previously discussed data reporting limitations prevent us from accessing a precise breakdown.

These trends underscore the importance of robust oversight mechanisms, such as AFIDA and the Committee on Foreign Investment in the U.S., in maintaining transparency and safeguarding national interests.

As foreign investment in U.S. agricultural land continues to grow and diversify, improving analysis and enforcement will remain critical to ensuring both economic and security considerations are effectively addressed. ■

ADDRESS

Continued from page 3

“Our farmers confronted a real problem head on – the long-term decline of water in the aquifer that sustains Idaho agriculture,” he said. “Our farmers worked hard to secure a new water deal that safeguards Idaho’s water sovereignty. Friends, let’s thank our farmers.”

“Along with our citizen legislators and Lt. Gov. Scott Bedke,” he added, “they crafted a new plan that maintains control of our water destiny, not other states, not the feds and not the men and women in robes.”

In his proposed budget, Little recommends the Idaho Legislature approve an additional \$30 million in funding to address critical water infrastructure needs.

This money could be used for potential storage capacity projects, aquifer recharge needs and innovative water efficiency tools.

“The ongoing funding will support Idaho’s main economic driver across the state – agriculture,” his proposed budget states.

In his State of the State address, Little said the state’s water funding plan “helps tackle the backlog of unfunded water projects, because securing water for future generations and protecting Idaho agriculture requires ... continued investments that have proven to raise water levels in the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer – the lifeblood of Idaho agriculture.”

The governor’s proposed budget also recommends \$100 million

“We will continue to improve our existing roads and bridges and get people and products across our state safely and efficiently.”

– Gov. Brad Little

for wildfire management “to ensure Idaho is prepared to manage and suppress fires quickly, before they threaten livestock, ranches, farms and homes.”

The budget includes a recommendation of \$5 million “for improved aviation and detection strategies to ensure early fire suppression....”

In his State of the State address, Little pointed out that he called out the feds last summer “for not putting out wildfires more aggressively ... I look forward to working with the Trump administration to boldly transform how wildfire and our western lands are managed.”

The governor encouraged additional funding to address critical transportation infrastructure such as roads and bridges, which are a critical asset for Idaho’s agriculture industry to move products to market quickly and efficiently.

“We will continue to improve our existing roads and bridges and get people and products across our state safely and efficiently,” he said.

The governor recommends a \$50 million investment in a bonding program which, according to his proposed budget, “will allow the state to bond for an additional \$800 million for new infrastructure and address some of the \$10 billion in unfunded projects that remain critical to support Idaho’s growth.”

The governor called for another \$100 million in tax relief for Idahoans and pledged to continue to cut red tape and reduce burdensome government regulations that stifle businesses.

“President Trump’s new Department of Government Efficiency is already looking to Idaho for the blueprint on how to cut red tape, stimulate economic growth and streamline government,” Little said.

When it comes to reducing red tape, “There is no doubt Idaho is on a roll,” he said. “Even Elon Musk posted on social media three times in one day about Idaho’s red tape reduction successes.”

Little said that in the coming weeks, “I will highlight all the ways Idaho is conquering waste in government, with some brand-new ideas on reducing government’s footprint in people’s lives.” ■



LEFT: A corn field in southwestern Idaho is irrigated in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo. In his proposed budget, Little recommends the Idaho Legislature approve an additional \$30 million in funding to address critical water infrastructure needs.



Photos by Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President Bryan Searle addresses Farm Bureau members and other ag industry representatives during IFBF's annual Legislative & Issue Advisory Conference.

Farm Bureau members meet with other ag groups and elected officials during annual Legislative Conference

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE – Idaho Farm Bureau Federation's annual Legislative Conference brings IFBF members from around the state to Boise to meet with elected officials and representatives of other ag groups.

The two-day event – officially, the Legislative & Issue Advisory Conference – is a chance for Farm Bureau members to experience the legislative process first-hand

and form relationships with their statewide elected officials.

It's also an opportunity for IFBF members to hear from members of other farm and ranch groups and understand their issues. The event took place Feb. 11-12 in Boise.

"Idaho Farm Bureau Federation is known as the Voice of Idaho Agriculture and it's only proper that we welcome, with open arms, members of all Idaho ag commodities," said IFBF President Bryan Searle. "If we didn't hear from other ag

groups and understand their issues, we would run the risk of not truly speaking for all of Idaho agriculture."

During the conference, Farm Bureau members heard directly from representatives of other ag groups representing several Idaho ag commodities, including the wine, cherry, apple, onion, hop, sugar beet, beef, dairy, horse and forestry industries.

Searle said understanding the issues important to other farm and ranch groups is very important to Farm Bureau.

All Idaho ag groups might not always



agree on every important issue, but “we’re all farmers and ranchers and we’re all after the same thing,” he said. “We appreciate each of you, the working relationships we have and the opportunity to work on all these issues together. We’re stronger together.”

“Just as important as it is to network with our elected officials, it’s equally important to speak with members of other ag groups,” said IFBF CEO Zak Miller.

“Whether it’s producers from a small crop or producers representing the biggest commodity in the state, we have to hear from those whose feet are on the ground, so when we craft our policy and advocate for agriculture, we can truly wear that mantle of the Voice of Idaho Agriculture,” he added. “Agriculture can’t be the backbone of Idaho’s economy and way of life if it’s missing a vertebrae.”

A highlight of the annual event is always the “legislative dinner,” which mixes lawmakers with Farm Bureau members during an informal dinner with no agenda other than to get to know each other and discuss important issues.

About 65 of the Idaho Legislature’s 105 members attended this year’s dinner, which was also attended by several statewide elected officials, including Gov. Brad Little.

“Legislators continue to comment on how much they look forward to our event and appreciate the opportunity to just relax and visit with folks from back home,” said Russ Hendricks, IFBF’s vice president of Governmental Affairs.

“It is always helpful for our members to visit with their legislators, especially when they share how bills will affect them and their farms or ranches,” he added. “Farm Bureau’s strength is our members and the relationships they have built with their legislators and other local elected officials.”

The legislative dinner is one of the hallmarks of Idaho Farm Bureau’s entire year, said Miller.

TOP: Idaho Farm Bureau Federation members listen to various presentations at the Capitol building during IFBF’s Legislative & Issue Advisory Conference, which took place Feb. 11-12 in Boise.

RIGHT: Moya Shatz-Dolsby, executive director of the Idaho Wine Commission, tells Idaho Farm Bureau Federation members a little about Idaho’s wine industry, during IFBF’s Legislative & Issue Advisory Conference.

“There’s nothing that makes me more confident in our ability to enact policy than when you fill a room with that many legislators and 200 of our members,” he said. “I believe that our legislators want to do the right thing and that interaction with our grassroots, salt-of-the-earth, passionate producers is where I think the strength of Farm Bureau comes from.”

Representatives of Idaho departments that have important interactions with agriculture, such as the agriculture, fish and game, environmental quality, and lands departments, also attended this year’s event, which took place Feb. 11-12 in Boise.

As always during the event, members of Idaho’s congressional delegation addressed conference attendees by video conference, updated them on important issues and fielded questions.

Delegation members told IFBF members they appreciate the counsel and support they receive from Farm Bureau.

“I appreciate what Farm Bureau does in advancing the cause of agriculture in the country,” said Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho.

“I’ve always enjoyed, since I was in the legislature, working with Farm Bureau,” said Rep. Russ Fulcher, R-Idaho. “Don’t forget to provide counsel. We don’t have a monopoly on wisdom here. Don’t hesitate to bring us ideas and counsel.”

The delegation updated IFBF members on several important issues, including the urgent need for a new Farm Bill.

“I can assure you that is in the hopper and being worked on,” said Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho.

Farm Bureau members also visited the Capitol building, where they attended committee meetings and were briefed on important issues by lawmakers and industry leaders.

During one briefing, Sen. Kelly Anthon, R-Rupert, and president pro tem of the Senate, urged Farm Bureau members to engage with their legislators and form relationships. This will become even more important as the state’s rapid growth means fewer and fewer legislators will come from agriculture in the future, he said.

“The ag industry is still the lifeblood of this (state’s) economy (and) the Farm Bureau is more important than ever,” Anthon said. “We need you.” ■





Idaho Barley Commission photo

According to a University of Idaho report, 2024 was a mixed bag for Idaho farmers and ranchers.

2024 a mixed bag for Idaho agriculture

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE – A University of Idaho report shows that 2024 was a mixed bag for Idaho's 22,000-plus farms and ranches.

Total farm-gate receipts for Idaho crop farmers fell an estimated 6 percent in 2024 compared to 2023, while livestock receipts increased by 11 percent.

That's according to U of I's annual *The Financial Condition of Idaho Agriculture* report, which was released to legislators Jan. 6.

The report estimates that Idaho's farmers and ranchers brought in a total of \$11.3 billion in farm-gate receipts in 2024. Farm-gate receipts are what a farmer or rancher receives directly for their commodity.

If realized, that \$11.3 billion total would be up 4 percent from 2023 and a record for Idaho, surpassing the \$11.28 billion total in 2022.

While presenting highlights of the report, FCIA co-author Brett Wilder, a U of I agricultural economist, told legislators that \$11.3 billion total seems like a counter-

feit number because a lot of crop farmers in Idaho faced stiff financial challenges in 2024.

Idaho's livestock sector, which includes the dairy and cattle and calves industries, generally had a much better year than the state's crop farmers, he said, and he believes that will continue to be the story in 2025.

"I am fairly confident we will continue to see strong cash receipts in the livestock sector, particularly in the cow-calf sector," he said. "The crop sector will continue to be squeezed."

According to the FCIA report, total farm-gate receipts from the state's livestock sector are estimated at a record \$7 billion in 2024, up 11 percent from 2023.

Total receipts from the crop sector, on the other hand, are estimated to have decreased 6 percent in 2024, to \$4.3 billion.

Total farm-gate revenue in 2024 was down for most of Idaho's top crops, with the exception of sugar beets.

According to estimates in the FCIA report, farm-gate receipts for potatoes in Idaho totaled \$1.25 billion in 2024, down 6 percent from 2023.

Receipts for Idaho wheat totaled \$564 million in 2024, down 7 percent from 2023, hay receipts totaled \$448 million, down 27 percent, and barley receipts totaled \$398 million, down 6 percent.

Farm-gate receipts from sugar beets were up 1 percent, to \$470 million.

For all "other" crops, receipts were down 6 percent.

As those numbers show, 2024 was a tough year financially for many crop farmers. While farm-gate crop prices dropped significantly in some cases, the cost of production for farmers remained close to the same.

Total farm and ranch production costs in Idaho were estimated at \$9.1 billion in 2024, down only slightly from a record \$9.3 billion in 2023.

"It was a really bad year last year," said Downey hay farmer Fred Burmester. "The commodity prices dropped a lot for us ... and our production costs were close to the same."

Rockland farmer Cory Kress said prices for the crops he produces dropped 35-50

"We are glad to see that the state's dairy sector ended the year on a positive note considering the scare, and challenges, that avian flu created."

— Bryan Searle, IFBF president

percent last year compared with the previous year.

"Commodity prices dropped tremendously on (the 2024) crop year," he said. Meanwhile, "Input costs were only down marginally."

High interest rates have made farming more difficult, Kress added. "That's the real killer we haven't had in quite some time."

According to the FCIA report, interest expenses for farmers and ranchers in Idaho were up 5 percent in 2024. According to U of I projections, total interest expense for farmers and ranchers in Idaho last year was \$647 million, up 61 percent since 2021.

"Interest rates are actually down a little bit year over year, but we are expecting higher interest expense and that means we're carrying more debt (and) paying more interest on that debt," Wilder told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation.

Burmester said he took out an operating loan at 9.2 percent interest last year. "It's going to take years to pay that back."

Kress said 2025 is looking like it will be another difficult year financially for farmers.

"I wouldn't call it a great year for farmers last year and this year doesn't look to be any better," he said.

Burmester is hoping farm-gate commodity prices take an upward swing in 2025, but he's not holding his breath.

"Usually, when (hay prices) dump like that, it takes a few years to work its way back up," he said.

Idaho livestock producers, however, are likely hoping 2025 is similar to 2024 when it comes to farm-gate commodity prices.

The cow-calf industry is continuing to experience record or near-record beef cattle prices, and milk prices took a turn for the better during the latter part of last year and are holding steady.

"We are glad to see that the state's dairy

sector ended the year on a positive note considering the scare, and challenges, that avian flu created," said Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President Bryan Searle.

According to the FCIA report, milk receipts in Idaho totaled \$3.8 billion last year, up 11 percent from 2023, and receipts from cattle and calves totaled a record \$2.9 billion, up 10 percent.

"For us, we did really well on our cattle side," said Jefferson County farmer Alan Clark, a crop and cattle producer. "That's where all of our profit came from."

Clark is expecting 2025 to be an even more difficult year on the crop side.

"It will definitely be a tougher year," he said. "We're going to (try to increase) yields to try to make up for it, but you can only do so much there. If we weren't diversified with our cows, it would be tough."

According to the FCIA report, the modest decrease in production expense was mainly due to slight decreases in the cost for fertilizers, pesticides, fuel and feed purchases.

Those declines were partially offset by higher interest expenses and an estimated 10 percent increase in the cost of livestock and poultry purchases.

"Most other categories were essentially flat last year," the report states.

The report also estimates that federal government payments to Idaho farmers decreased 14 percent.

During his presentation to lawmakers, Wilder said another U of I report found that agriculture in Idaho is directly and indirectly responsible for about \$38 billion in sales per year, which is 17 percent of the state's economic output. That report also found agriculture is responsible for one in nine jobs in Idaho and 13 percent of the state's gross domestic product.

"Idaho is a (relatively) small economy, but ag is very important to us," he said. ■



Submitted photo

University of Idaho Extension weed scientist Albert Adjesiwor stands by Palmer amaranth in a field in southern Idaho.

Herbicide-resistant weed continues spreading through southern Idaho

By **John O'Connell**
University of Idaho

MOSCOW, Idaho – A herbicide-resistant pigweed first confirmed in the state less than three years ago has already infested more than 7,000 acres of southern Idaho cropland and is taking a heavy toll on yields, a University of Idaho Extension weed scientist warns.

In 2022, Albert Adjesiwor, who is based at the U of I Kimberly Research and Extension Center, began showing potted Palmer amaranth plants to area growers and agronomists.

He taught them to identify the pigweed by its smooth stems, egg-shaped leaves and elongated petioles, knowing it was already widespread in many surrounding states and convinced it would soon surface in Idaho.

That same season, Adjesiwor's fears were confirmed when he received a report from a Glens Ferry farmer about a pigweed that seemed to be immune to glyphosate herbicide.

By 2023, Adjesiwor and his colleagues estimated 3,000 acres of southern Idaho cropland were infested with Palmer amaranth.

Based on extensive scouting, Adjesiwor estimated the infested acreage had more than doubled as of 2024, stretching from Paul to Parma.

"It was clear that everywhere we had it in 2023, we had it in 2024," Adjesiwor said. "The farmers use the same equipment to harvest and till, and they move it around in their fields. The seeds are very small, and it doesn't take much to have a problem on your hands."

Palmer amaranth can grow upward of 10 feet tall, towering over crop canopies. Last August, a Glens Ferry farmer allowed Clarke Alder with Amalgamated Sugar Co., Adjesiwor, and Oregon State University (OSU) weed scientist Joel Felix to test dig at 17 locations in a sugar beet field with varying levels of Palmer amaranth infestation.

The researchers confirmed yield losses of up to 47% due to the weed.

In 2023, Palmer amaranth also began cropping up in Washington and Oregon fields. U of I, OSU and Washington State University are now collaborating on a project funded with \$27,000 from the Northwest Potato Research Consortium to scout the three

states for Palmer amaranth and post the counties where weeds are found on the Pacific Northwest Herbicide Resistance Initiative website.

The grant funding has also helped the researchers collect weed seeds and grow them out in a greenhouse to conduct herbicide-resistance testing.

One group of Palmer amaranth plants was able to withstand applications of 16 times the usual dosage of glyphosate, which is the active ingredient in Roundup herbicide.

Testing also confirmed at least 70% resistance to Group 2 herbicides, which are commonly used in potato, dry bean and small grains production, as well resistance to Group 4 and Group 27 herbicides.

Palmer amaranth is native to the desert Southwest and likely entered Idaho in birdfeed, cottonseed meal fed to cattle or on farm equipment brought in from other states.

Idaho hosted a public meeting last summer on the possibility of listing Palmer amaranth as a noxious weed, but the petition failed, based largely on concerns about the added cost of management and testing certified crop seed for the presence of weed seed.

The weed is especially problematic for farmers who raise sugar beets, alfalfa or corn varieties that are developed to withstand applications of Roundup.

Some fields in the Bruneau area, where farmers planted Roundup Ready corn following Roundup Ready sugar beets, were especially hard hit by Palmer amaranth.

Palmer amaranth can also be a nightmare for potato farmers, as there are few good herbicide options available for use after the weed emerges.

Adjesiwor's advice to growers who find Palmer amaranth in their fields is to report it and, if possible, rotate to small grains during the following growing season.

"Small grains are often established before Palmer amaranth starts to emerge and there are a lot more management tools. Most herbicides labeled for small grains will kill Palmer amaranth," Adjesiwor said.

In many cereal fields, Adjesiwor discovered Palmer amaranth re-growing following harvest. Growers may opt to till their weeds or apply additional herbicides following harvest.

Also during 2022, Adjesiwor discovered Idaho's first water hemp – which is another pigweed that's developed resistance to glyphosate and other important herbicides. Water hemp, which was also found in the state's southern growing region, has not proliferated as quickly as Palmer amaranth.

Looking ahead, Adjesiwor has submitted a grant to evaluate post-emergence options for controlling Palmer amaranth in potatoes.

He also plans to conduct additional herbicide-resistance screening during the upcoming growing season using funding from a USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture grant that UI Extension entomologist Erik Wenninger received for integrated pest management.

"I'm concerned by the number of herbicides Palmer amaranth is resistant to and how fast it can develop resistance," Adjesiwor said. "If you have Palmer amaranth, you still have to deal with other weed problems. This is an additional thing farmers have to spend money to control, and the yield loss potential is very high compared with most of the weed species we have." ■

Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins



"This is where we get pulled pork."



"I'm a wind turbine technician."

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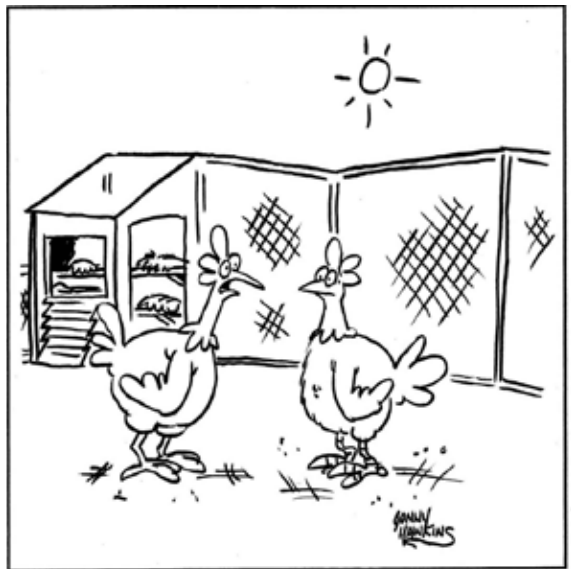


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Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins



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Embracing the Chaos

How disturbance fuels forest sustainability

By **Randy Brooks**
University of Idaho

Forests are often perceived as serene and stable landscapes, but in reality, they are dynamic and constantly evolving ecosystems.

Disturbance, whether natural or anthropogenic (human-caused), plays a vital role in maintaining the health, diversity, and sustainability of forests.

These disturbances—whether caused by fire, wind, pests, disease, or human activity—are often seen as disruptive forces. However, far from being merely destructive, disturbances are essential to forest regeneration and long-term sustainability.

Embracing the chaos that disturbance brings can help us understand the complex relationship between these forces and the forest ecosystems that depend on them. In this article we will briefly examine how disturbances fuel forest sustainability and the role they play in fostering resilience, diversity, and ecological balance in forests.

Natural disturbances

Natural disturbances have been shaping forests for millennia, and many forest species are adapted to these regular events. Some of the most common natural disturbances include:

Fire: Wildfires are a natural part of many forest ecosystems, especially in areas with dry climates. Fire clears dead vegetation, recycles nutrients back into the soil, and creates gaps in the forest canopy that allow new plants to establish in the understory.

LEFT: Logging is a forest disturbance that can fuel forest sustainability.

Photos by John Nicholson



Idaho's
Private
Forest

Certain species, such as lodgepole pine, depend on fire for seed germination. While fire can seem destructive, it plays an important role in maintaining forest health and biodiversity by preventing the overaccumulation of dead biomass and promoting the growth of fire-adapted species.

Wind: Windstorms, tornadoes, and hurricanes can cause significant damage to forests by uprooting trees, breaking branches, and creating canopy gaps. These gaps are beneficial for forest regeneration, allowing light to reach the forest floor and encouraging the growth of understory plants.

Wind also contributes to the structural diversity of forests, which supports a range of species with different habitat needs.

Insects and Disease: Insects such as bark beetles and diseases like fungal infections or root disease, can weaken or kill trees. While these pests can be harmful in the short term, they help regulate forest populations by removing weak or diseased trees and creating space for new growth.

In forests with high biodiversity, insect and disease outbreaks are less likely to lead to catastrophic collapse, as different species respond differently to such pressures.

Anthropogenic disturbances

Human activities, often more intense and widespread than natural disturbances, have increased the frequency and severity of many disturbances. These anthropogenic disturbances are primarily the result of deforestation, industrial logging, land development, and pollution. Some examples of human-induced disturbances include:

Deforestation: The clearing of forests for agriculture, urban development, or industrial activities leads to permanent loss of forest cover, disrupting ecosystem functions and biodiversity. Unlike natural disturbances, deforestation may result in irreversible damage to ecosystems and can undermine the sustainability of the forest.

Logging: When done sustainably in conjunction with best management practices, logging can be a managed disturbance that helps maintain forest health by allowing for regeneration and creating spaces for young trees to grow.

Despite the negative impacts of disturbances, they are necessary for forest resilience and long-term sustainability.

Disturbances are a form of ecological chaos, but they provide the opportunity for forests to regenerate, adapt, and evolve.

There are several ways in which disturbance fuels forest sustainability.

One of the primary ways disturbances contribute to forest sustainability is by creating gaps in the forest canopy. Whether through fire, wind, or pest outbreaks, these gaps allow light to reach the forest floor, promoting the growth of understory plants and new trees.



Fire, whether natural or prescribed, is a disturbance that can fuel forest sustainability.

This regeneration is crucial for maintaining forest biodiversity and ensuring that the forest can continue to support a variety of species over time.

For example, after a wildfire, a forest may experience a surge of new plant life, with certain species thriving in the newly opened space. Over time, these plants will mature, and the forest will regenerate in a more diverse and resilient way.

Enhancing biodiversity

Disturbances create a mosaic of habitats within a forest, allowing different species

to thrive in the newly altered landscape. Some species are adapted to specific disturbance regimes, such as fire or flood, and rely on these events for survival.

Disturbances can also promote genetic diversity within populations by creating conditions for species migration, adaptation, and reproduction.

For instance, certain plants may only reproduce successfully after a fire, while others thrive in the nutrient-rich soil left behind by a flood. This diversity strengthens the ecosystem by making it more resilient to future disturbances.

Preventing monocultures and promoting structural diversity

Monocultures, or forests dominated by a single species, are vulnerable to pests, diseases, and climate change. Disturbances, particularly those caused by insects, disease, and fire, help maintain structural diversity in forests by thinning out weak or non-native species and allowing a mix of tree species to grow.

Recognizing the importance of disturbance in maintaining forest health is crucial for developing effective forest management strategies. Instead of trying to eliminate disturbances, forest managers should focus on embracing them in ways that promote resilience and sustainability.

This can be done through strategies like adaptive management, which involves adjusting forest management practices based on the response of the forest to disturbances, and controlled burns, which mimic natural fire regimes and promote ecosystem health.

By understanding the role of disturbance in forest ecosystems, we can learn to work with, rather than against, the forces that shape the landscapes we rely on. Embracing the chaos of disturbance is essential for building resilient, sustainable forests that can continue to provide ecosystem services for future generations. ■

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



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Rancher and prolific writer Heather Smith Thomas offers livestock expertise and entertainment with six decades of articles and books

By Dianna Troyer
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



In a 6-degree December snowstorm, the 20-pound-calf was still miraculously alive after his premature birth. His mother stood guard, protecting him from a nearby hungry coyote.

Heather Smith Thomas and her husband, Lynn, were gathering their cattle in a mountain pasture to bring them home for the winter at Sky Range Ranch about 14 miles southeast of Salmon in eastern Idaho.

“I still remember how velvety his short hair felt and how cold he was,” Thomas said. “Lynn carried him to his jeep and drove him home, while I kept herding the cattle from horseback.”

Their kids, Michael and Andrea, noticed the calf’s red frostbitten nose and named him Rudolph. He slept in Andrea’s old crib in the kitchen and was treated with antibiotics for pneumonia.

“By Christmas morning, we knew he was going to live,” Thomas said.

Rudolph was one of more than two dozen calves that lived in the Thomases’ house until their health was restored. They became memorialized in her newspaper and magazine articles and books.

For six decades, Thomas has written more than 15,000 articles for horse and cattle newspapers and magazines along with 23 books about horse training, livestock care, and life on the ranch she has called home since childhood.

“It’s not often that you get to do the things you love,” she said of writing, training horses, and raising cattle along Withington Creek beneath the Lemhi Range.

She still writes for more than 25 publications, getting up at about 4 a.m. to write or do interviews on the East Coast before helping with chores, then squeezing in writing when possible during the rest of the day. She’s in bed by 9 p.m.

“I’m still enjoying my relationship with cattle, still trying to learn everything I can about these marvelous animals and sharing my experiences with my readers,” she said. “I’m still shoeing my horses and took Dottie’s shoes off in mid-November.”

ABOVE: Heather and Ed get ready for a ride.
LEFT: Heather Smith Thomas checks fences on Sky Range Ranch south of Salmon, where she and her husband, Lynn, have been raising cattle since 1967. Photos courtesy of Heather Smith Thomas

“I started writing to express my interest and passion about animals. At first, I wrote about horses, then expanded to cattle. I sold 50-plus articles to horse and children’s magazines.”

– Heather Smith Thomas

Her sources extend nationwide.

“If I’m writing about a health care topic or medical problem I don’t have a lot of personal experience with, I’ll call veterinarians, breeders, university professors, and researchers. I’ve always enjoyed ‘meeting’ many people by phone.”

Readers, editors, and sources become friends

Those experts and her editors along with readers have become friends who sometimes drop in to visit.

“We met a lot of wonderful folks who went out of their way to come to our place when they were travelling,” she said. “The result was many lifelong friends we still correspond with, and some have come to visit multiple times.”

Readers at “Grainews” cherished Thomas’ monthly “Rancher’s Diary” column about the joys and perils of raising livestock so much that editor Lee Hart was compelled to visit and accept her supper invitation.

Even before reaching the house, he wrote that he knew he was in the right place when he saw Veggie, a 28-year-old grey horse in the corral that he had read about for many years.

In the house were smiling photos on all the walls of the Thomases’ kids and grandkids and horses.

While making supper, Thomas told stories of her most memorable horses, especially her first horse, Possum, a gelding with one blue eye who was named for his sleepy disposition. At age 9, she was too short to get on him without climbing on a fence or rock, which wasn’t always available.

“We worked out a system. I’d lead him to a grassy area, and while he had his head down grazing, I straddled his neck, facing his withers. Then he’d raise his head and I’d slide and wiggle to his back, turning around to a mounted position.”

Expressing gratitude before eating, Hart joined the family in singing the “Johnny Appleseed Grace,” a tradition instilled by Thomas’ father, a Methodist minister who always wanted a small cattle ranch and finally fulfilled his dream along Withington Creek.

As teens, Thomas and her brother helped build new fences and repair old ones on the property.



Heather shoes her son’s horse Brownie. She still does her own farrier work and took shoes off her mare Dottie in mid-November.

“Our most heroic effort was to help build three miles of fence around our 320-acre mountain pasture – the part of our ranch, originally a separate homestead, that had never had a complete fence around it,” she said. “Dad paid us 50 cents an hour or 50 cents a post-hole. On the pasture and garden fence we made more money by the post-hole, but on the ridges in the mountains it might take several hours to chisel a hole through the rocks and then we were glad for 50 cents an hour!”

In high school, she launched her writing career.

“I started writing to express my interest and passion about animals,” she said. “At first, I wrote about horses, then expanded to cattle. I sold 50-plus articles to horse and children’s magazines.”

Her articles helped pay for her education at the University of Puget Sound. During the summer between her sophomore and junior years, she wrote the manuscript for her first book, “A Horse in Your Life: A Guide for the New Owner.”

It was published in 1966, the year she graduated from college with degrees in history and English.

Smith's original career goal was to become a veterinarian.

"At that time, vet schools didn't accept women," she said. "Instead, I learned about livestock care through my writing career."

After college, she and Lynn, who had known each other in high school and dated in college, were married in March 1966. They ran a small dairy farm near Gooding with the goal of saving enough money to eventually return to Withington Creek to run her dad's ranch.

In 1967, they returned and started purchasing his ranch "as well as half the ranch where we're living now. For 40 years we leased the other parcels, putting it all together. With hard work and my writing, this was enough land to have enough cows to create a livelihood."

Sky Range Ranch stretches for five miles along the narrow creek canyon.

"It was a tremendous challenge – to create new ditches and repair old ones, and build more than 10 miles of new fences and repair the old ones on parts of these ranches," she said. "There are more than 25 miles of fence and 10 miles of ditches on this strung-out place."

Thomas describes their ranch as "beautiful country but not very productive with steep hill pastures and limited hay ground in small meadows along the creek. To maximize our grazing potential, we have cross fences to facilitate pasture rotations and bought extra hay."

With crossbred bulls of several breeds, they developed a herd with genetics suited to the high-altitude pastures.

"We usually had 180 cows and 30 to 40 yearling heifers – with all of them named," she said. "To make it all work, we became tough, enduring, and innovative."

She laughs at her most innovative way to fix a fence when she ran out of twine. Why not use hair from her horse's tail instead?

"Some of those hair strands I used to hold the wire back in place lasted for years," she said.

Although she sometimes rode solo to check cattle, she never felt alone. Like old friends, she was accompanied by larks, grouse, antelope, elk, golden eagles, scolding squirrels, mule deer, and coyotes.

She could never predict what she might



ABOVE: Heather and Lynn Thomas welcome editors and readers to their ranch.

RIGHT: Rudolph, a premature calf born in December, lived in the Thomases' kitchen while recovering from pneumonia.

find. At times, a herd of elk went through a fence. "They usually jump the fences, but sometimes they are lazy and knock them over and cattle might stray onto the neighboring range. Then I'd have to go look for them. On one particular day, I was glad to find Boogie Woogie, daughter of Shimmy, sister of Tango."

A few years ago, the Thomases sold sections of the ranch to their son Michael and daughter Andrea.

"We're still doing what we love – just on a smaller scale," she said.

Winter writing projects

During winter, Thomas has a little more time to write. Her current project is a book called "Raising Cattle on Your Homestead Farm."

Many of her stories are still posted at smallfarmersjournal.com. Her blog that she wrote for many years is also still posted.

Along with technical books, Thomas wrote a three-book ranch series "in the James Herriot tradition," according to an editor at "Gulf Coast Cattleman."

She describes heart-warming bonds



with livestock, pets, and wildlife in "Horse Tales," "Cow Tales," and "Ranch Tales."

Whenever Thomas checks off another story on her list, often two will replace it.

"I'll never run out of things to write about," she said. ■

Her books are available on Amazon or by contacting her at P.O. Box 15, Salmon, Idaho 83467 or by calling at (208) 756-2841.



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U of I survey finds voles eating away at potato profits

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

MOSCOW, Idaho — University of Idaho Extension educators are surveying southern and eastern Idaho potato farmers to document the scope of their problems with mouselike rodents known as voles.

Extension educators Jason Thomas, Minidoka County, and Danielle Gunn, Fort Hall Reservation, are leading the survey effort, and Extension agricultural economist Patrick Hatzenbuehler will estimate crop losses based on responses.

Hatzenbuehler presented some preliminary data at the Idaho Potato Conference, which U of I hosted in Pocatello in January, based on surveys from 84 respondents.

On average, the initial respondents each had 1,465 acres of potatoes affected by voles, which reduced their spud yields by 18% on those acres. Furthermore, 58% of respondents used rodenticide to control voles, investing a combined \$2.05 million in those treatments.

On a scale of one to five, with five being the most effective, 92% of growers surveyed rated the efficacy of rodenticide treatments at three or less.

Another 16.7% of growers surveyed attempted to control voles through habitat modifications, such as plowing, mowing or installing barriers, and 9.5% of respondents had to replant at least some of their acres.

My belief is at least I can help tell the story so they can make the case and have some numbers. I know this is an ongoing struggle farmers will continue to have.”

– Jason Thomas, UI extension educator

Area farmers frequently call Extension pest specialists to voice their frustrations about the lack of good options to prevent voles from eating away their profits. Thomas explained that he and his colleagues have had no recourse but to offer the same suggestions farmers have tried for years, with limited success.

He has become convinced that the first step toward getting long-overdue help for farmers struggling with voles should be to compile good data.

“As folks were reaching out to me and asking, ‘What do we do about this?’ it was hard to do anything without data,” Thomas said. “My belief is at least I can help tell the story so they can make the case and have some numbers. I know this is an ongoing struggle farmers will continue to have.”

The brief survey focuses on potato production but will also in-



clude a question asking farmers to list any additional crops that have been ravaged by voles.

Valley Agronomics has also been soliciting growers to complete the survey, which is available online.

Survey data could support the need for additional investment in research, direct aid to growers or new policies and regulations pertaining to vole control.

The UI Extension team chose to focus on potatoes based on the high value of the crop. In addition to losing tonnage, potato farmers with heavy vole damage must often sell spuds with chew marks at a discount for making potato flakes rather than at a premium for making French fries or for the fresh market.

“If we’re successful with potatoes, we can move to different crops later,” Hatzembuehler said.

Many regional grain and alfalfa fields also routinely sustain significant vole damage. Alfalfa damage from voles affects stand longevity and productivity significantly.

Decades ago, voles were effectively controlled in Idaho by flood irrigation and moldboard plowing. The shift toward sprinkler irrigation and no-till farming throughout Idaho has been great for soil health, water conservation and the environment, but burrowing voles have also benefited.

“In years past, they’d have one or two years where voles would be bad. It seems like anymore, every year is a bad year,” said UI Extension educator Joseph Sagers, who handles the vole issue in Jefferson County.

This winter, Sagers has been consulting with alfalfa farmers in Terreton, Montevieu, Menan and Blackfoot who have experimented with running a roller over snow-covered fields to compact vole tunnels.

Following treatments, voles lose their cover and are easily spotted by predators against the white, snowy background.

“They have a whole bunch of voles coming up to the surface, where they’re eaten pretty quickly,” Sagers said. “This is certainly going to be a useful tool in the toolbox for these farmers.”

Last spring, vole populations in at least



Photo by Joe Sagers

Southern and eastern Idaho potato farmers are being surveyed about the scope of their problems with mouselike rodents known as voles.

11 counties reached epidemic levels, causing significant damage to crops and rangeland.

Heading into winter, Gunn advises growers who have had serious vole problems to consider removing or modifying vole habitat and food sources and to remove snow, if feasible. Zinc phosphide is the most effective rodenticide for voles but cannot be applied when soil moisture is high or there’s precipitation.

Anticoagulant rodenticides cannot be

applied directly to any feed crops but may be applied to field perimeters.

“A survey is instrumental in helping UI Extension educators collect important information regarding vole populations and cyclicity, as well as data regarding crop and range loss due to vole infestations,” Gunn said. “The data will be submitted to state and federal agencies to demonstrate the significant need for programming and funding to help mitigate the harmful effects of these vertebrate pests.” ■

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LOOKING FOR A NEW PODCAST? DIRT ROAD DISCUSSIONS

Episode 77- Kaala: Runway Model To Hawaiian Farmer

As a young girl, Kaala Clark was the daughter of a single mom who had acquired 3 acres of farmland in Hawaii. They lived in a camper trailer with no running water and no mirrors. However, when Kaala started finding photos of her mom with celebrities around the world, she began asking questions. Recruited to be a young model, Kaala had to wait until the age of 17 to leave their small patch of land to travel to global modeling cities. What a cultural shock. After her brushes with celebrities and modeling, she felt the call to return home to the land of Hawaii and become a farmer among her people. In this interview, she discusses how the modeling industry helped shape her grit for farming and how this Hawaiian girl is working smarter, not harder.

