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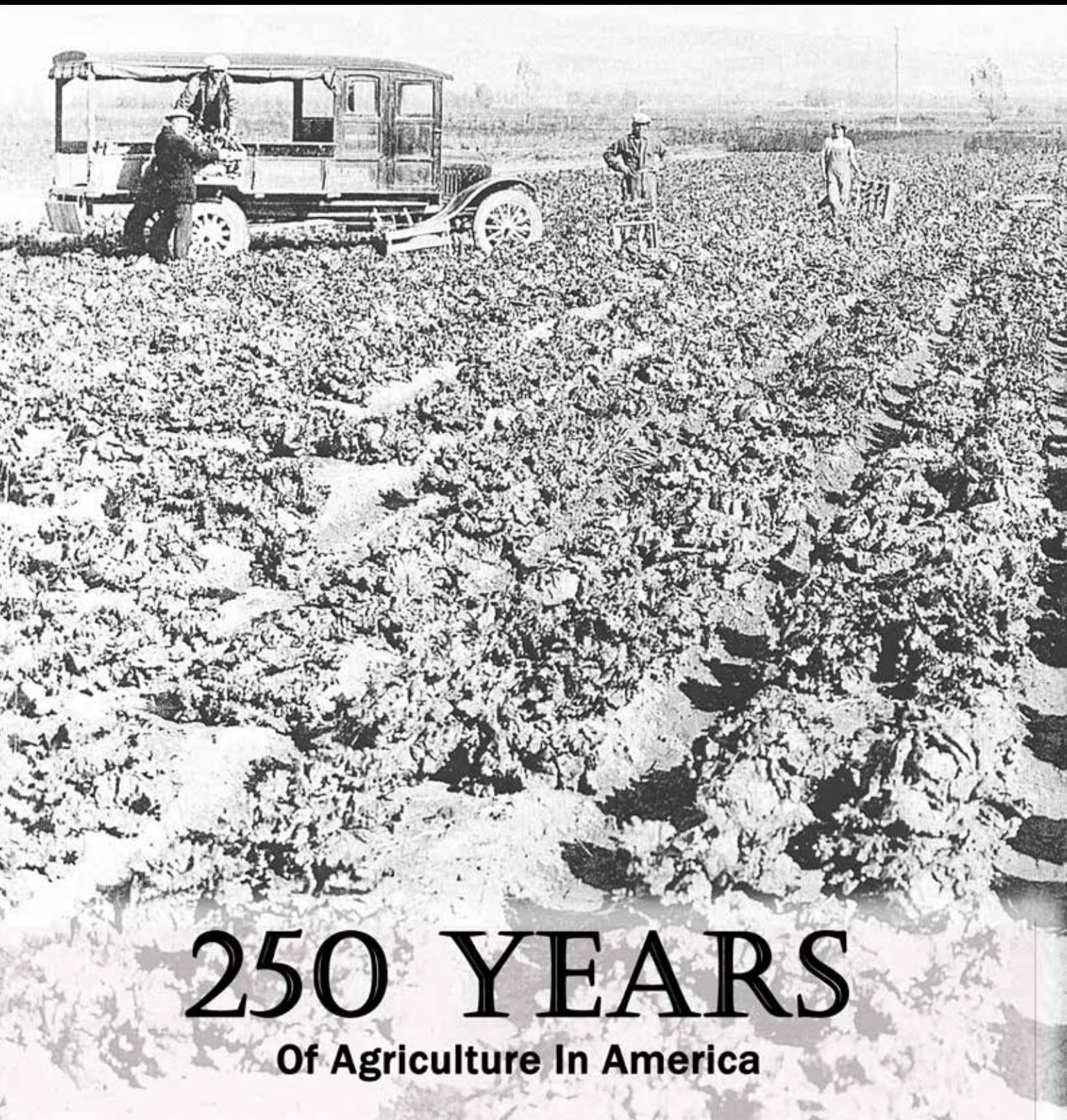

# 250 YEARS

## Of Agriculture In America

## The Zipline

**By Zippy Duvall**
President, American Farm Bureau Federation

# Celebrating 250 years of American agriculture

Several weeks ago, I had the opportunity to spend time on a century farm in Hagerstown, Maryland. As I stood with the family and heard stories of the generations who had worked that land before them, I couldn't help but think about how many farms across America have stories just like theirs.

As we celebrate America's 250th birthday this year, those stories are worth remembering. It's a time to celebrate the freedoms and opportunities that define our nation and it's also a chance to reflect on the people whose work helps make those opportunities possible.

FARM 250 celebrates American agriculture's legacy

Long before highways, airports and technology connected the country, agriculture helped lay the foundation for communities to grow and thrive. Since then, generations of farmers and ranchers have helped feed our country and strengthen local economies.

See, **DUVALL,** page 6

## The President's Desk

**By Matt Dorsey**
President, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

# The future of farming is up to us

Slated for closure in 2009, the University of Idaho's Parma agricultural research center pulled a phoenix and rose from the ashes.

U of I officials recently celebrated the Parma Research and Extension Center's 100th anniversary.

The effort to save and actually revive the research station was led by the agricultural industry itself – growers from across southwestern Idaho who couldn't imagine life without it.

There's a lesson in there somewhere for farmers today, especially young farmers and ranchers, who may doubt there's a future available to them in agriculture as they face numerous challenges, including commodity prices that remain lower than what it costs to produce them.

Throw in the cost and availability of land and many of our young farmers and ranchers – even some of us more "experienced" farmers – are discouraged about their future in agriculture.

See, **DORSEY,** page 7

## Inside Farm Bureau

**By Zak Miller**
CEO, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

# It's harder alone

Some of the most amazing—and perhaps embellished—stories come from the times we are alone. The fish is always bigger, the mountain steeper, the situation harder when one is on his own.

And tall tales aside, it really is harder to do most things alone.

As a species, we aren't physically impressive—not especially big, fast, or strong, and no claws to speak of.

Bears are bigger, cheetahs faster, horses both, yet no species on earth is more dominant. Two things explain it: our intelligence and our willingness to pull together.

It shows in how we live. According to the Pew Research Center, 86% of Americans live in urban or suburban areas, surrounded by neighbors and the rhythm of crowds. Only 14% live rural, and a good share of them are the farmers and ranchers who feed the rest.

See, **MILLER,** page 6

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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

COVER: **This photo, courtesy of Bannock County Historical Society, shows a lettuce field from Okamura Gardens near Pocatello in 1926. See page 10 for a timeline of agricultural advancements in the United States and Idaho over the past 250 years.**

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Submitted photo

**The state ag department continues to fight the Japanese beetle, which could harm a significant number of Idaho crops if it ever establishes a foothold here.**

# Ag department continues to attack Japanese beetles

**By Sean Ellis**
*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

POCATELLO – The Japanese beetle, a non-native invasive pest that attacks a wide variety of crops, has popped up in Acequia, which is near Rupert and is located in the heart of Idaho farm country.

That's the bad news. The good news is that only five of the beetles have been found there so far.

Idaho State Department of Agriculture officials are taking an aggressive approach to try to eradicate the pest from that area, as they do in all areas where the beetle pops up from time to time.

"We take an aggressive approach to make sure we don't see those numbers boom before we can actually handle the situation," said Vene Stewart, a pest survey and detection specialist who is helping lead ISDA's attack on the beetles.

The ISDA currently has 800 Japanese beetle traps located around the Rupert area in an effort to determine where the pest might be present.

The beetle is a highly destructive plant pest that feeds on more than 300 different agricultural and ornamental plants. Because it is a major threat to the state's agricultural industry, the ISDA surveys for the pest and attacks it when it appears in various places throughout the state.

Stewart said the beetles are not picky eaters. "They eat about 300 different types of flowering plants. Pretty much anything that flowers, they would love to demolish."

As of now, the ISDA is also attacking the pest in the Caldwell and Pocatello areas. Last year, the ag department detected 160 Japanese beetles in Caldwell and 12 in Pocatello.

People in those areas and in Acequia may notice some of the hundreds of yellow traps set up to try to detect the beetle's presence.

"We will be treating all three of those areas this year," Stewart said.

Like Acequia, Caldwell is located in the heart of farm country. There are about 700 traps scattered around the Caldwell area.

*"It's unfortunately not something that we can just treat one time and assume everything's going to be (OK) the following year. It's something we're going to have to keep up on."*

*– Vene Stewart, pest survey and detection specialist*

"The Caldwell infestation isn't moving at all," Stewart said. "In fact, where we are finding the beetles is getting to be a smaller and smaller area. You like to see that."

There are about 550 traps in the Pocatello area.

The ISDA's battle against the beetle in those areas won't be a one-and-done situation.

"It's unfortunately not something that we can just treat one time and assume everything's going to be (OK) the following year," Stewart said. "It's something we're going to have to keep up on."

According to a recent University of Idaho study, agriculture accounts for one in every nine jobs in the state, 17% of total sales and 12% of total gross state product.

The ISDA has attacked the pest wherever it pops up in Idaho to ensure it doesn't gain a permanent presence here.

The beetle appeared in large numbers in the Boise area about 15 years ago and the ISDA's aggressive attack on the pest there has resulted in it not being detected in that city for several years. The ISDA's eradication effort in Boise was the largest documented Japanese beetle eradication in U.S. history, according to ISDA officials.

The ag department takes a similar aggressive approach when the beetle pops up elsewhere.

"We definitely want to protect our agriculture, especially in Caldwell where it is such an agriculture-(rich) area," Stewart said. "It's definitely important to the residents and the farmers out there to make sure that we keep our eye on it and make some progress."

Stewart said the state's ag industry, as well as the general public and city officials, have supported the department's Japanese beetle eradication efforts.

Photo by Sean Ellis

**A Japanese beetle trap is located near the foothills 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.

If the beetle ever did gain a permanent foothold in Idaho, besides causing decreased production, it would mean increased pesticide use. There's also the potential of losing markets that could impose quarantine restrictions.

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.

ISDA officials believe the beetles likely get here by hitchhiking with people moving from infested states. ■

# DUVALL

*Continued from page 2*

*'While FARM 250 celebrates our history, it is also a reminder that agriculture's story is still being written. Every generation of farmers faces new opportunities and new obstacles.'*

Many farms are still family owned today. In fact, 97% of farms in this country are family farms. Some have been in the same family for generations. Others are just beginning to build a legacy of their own. Each farm has a unique story, but what we share is a commitment to hard work, stewardship and service that has helped shape our country.

One of the goals of FARM 250 is to help share those unique stories. Our FARM 250 webpage features farm stories from across the country, including the Maryland farm I visited. If you have a story to tell, I encourage you to participate in our FARM 250 Photo Contest and help showcase the people, places and traditions that make agriculture such an important part of our country.

FARM 250 looks to the future of agriculture

While FARM 250 celebrates our history, it is also a reminder that agriculture's story is still being written. Every generation of farmers faces new opportunities and new obstacles.

The tools, crops and markets may change, but the commitment to caring for our land, our animals and our families remains the same. That commitment has driven remarkable innovation. Today, farmers produce more food while using fewer resources, thanks to advancements in agriculture. In fact, it would have taken 115 million more acres 30 years ago to produce the same amount of food we do today.


AFBF photo

Farmers and ranchers will continue adapting, innovating and finding new ways to provide the food, fuel and fiber Americans depend on every day. We will continue caring for the land so it can support future generations. And we will continue strengthening the rural communities we call home.

That spirit has carried American agriculture through the past 250 years, and it will carry us forward through the next 250 years as well.

This year, Farm Bureau is proud to celebrate the farm families who helped build this country and those who continue to move it forward. Our farm stories are woven into the fabric of our nation. And thanks to the resilience, innovation and commitment to serving others that mark farmers and ranchers from sea to shining sea, agriculture will continue to stock dinner tables and support communities across America for generations to come. ■

# MILLER

*Continued from page 2*

Where most Americans function elbow to elbow, these folks are often alone—miles of fence and field between them and the next person.

And that's okay. More than okay—it's an affirmation of who they are. For many, the call to agriculture is a love of the quiet, of animals and weather and work that doesn't require a meeting.

The solitude isn't loneliness; it's their preferred place of peace, and they can carry more alone than most people would believe. None of that needs fixing.

But liking the quiet and never needing anyone are two different things. Recently, while trailing cattle to summer grass, a situation proved the point. One bull decided he wanted nothing to do with the herd and planted himself in an aspen thicket, determined to stay.

I'll admit I hate aspens—gnarled and thick, as if their only purpose is to make passage miserable. My knees still ache remembering how often they were scratched against those trunks as I tried to evict that bull.

He was clever, using the trees against me: force him left and he'd duck right, and the thicket wouldn't let me move fast enough to

stop him. The fight raged on, just as it had for my nephew before I arrived. Only when we got enough riders into the thicket did we finally move him where he belonged.

That bull wasn't weak. He was strong, stubborn, and dug in deep where no one could reach him—and that's exactly why he was stuck. It took more of us, working together, to free him. Sometimes the same is true of a person.

So, to all the farmers and ranchers: I admire your grit, your ingenuity, and your patience. Don't change who you are—keep your quiet mornings and long days, because they suit you and the rest of us are better for the work you do in them.

But when the load gets heavy, be a little less stubborn. The weather this year hasn't been your friend, and neither have the markets. The burden may be yours to carry, but you don't have to carry all of it alone.

It's okay to be tough; it's not okay to be broken.

Calling on a neighbor to gather cattle is no different from calling on a friend when your own thoughts get too heavy to wrangle. Watch your mental health the way you watch the sky before a storm, and don't be afraid to team up—for the ranch, for the farm, and most of all for yourself.

*'Calling on a neighbor to gather cattle is no different from calling on a friend when your own thoughts get too heavy to wrangle.'*

Reaching out, whether for a hand with the work or just someone to talk to, isn't weakness. It's the same intelligence that carried our species this far, paired with the wisdom to know we were never meant to do the hardest things alone.

Love your solitude—just don't let it become a thicket. When the day comes that you need it, let someone ride in beside you, because it really is harder alone. ■

# DORSEY

*Continued from page 2*

The revival of the U of I Parma station could serve as a template for what must be done.

The 200-acre research center conducts research on many of the crops grown in the region, and Idaho, including vegetables, forages, cereals, hops, mint and fruit and seed crops.

During a recession, the U of I's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences lost nearly $5 million in state funding for research efforts. As a result, Parma was slated for closure.

At one point, it was already closed on paper.

But farmers who depend on the cutting-edge research done at the station couldn't imagine life without it and they got together and determined to prevent its closure.

They created a group called Treasure Valley Agricultural Coalition and rallied to save it. That effort included TVAC members themselves providing $149,000 to the station just to keep the lights on.

With skin in the game, they went to legislators and the governor with a request to spare the station. It worked.

*'If anyone can find a solution to the many challenges in agriculture right now, or at least get the ball rolling on possible solutions, it's farmers and ranchers.'*

Seventeen years later, the station is not only still open, it's thriving.

In 2024, U of I officials celebrated the opening of a modern, $12 million facility at the Parma center that contains laboratory space for research in nematology, pomology, plant pathology, microbiology and hops.

That new 9,600-square-foot building replaced antiquated facilities that were more than 50 years old in some cases.

The Parma station's remarkable turnaround started with farmers. To be sure, legislators, then-governor Butch Otter, and others were part of that turnaround.

But it was farmers themselves who got the ball rolling.

As I said, there's a lesson here. At the Parma research center's darkest time, the idea of saving it probably seemed unlikely.

But as current Parma station director Chris Caron said during the 100th year celebration: "So farmers did what farmers do — they fought back and they pushed to find a solution."

As dark as times might seem now for many farmers and ranchers who are struggling financially and face a seemingly never-ending list of challenges, I would encourage all of us to rally together to try to find solutions.

It's up to us. No white knight is coming to save us, and temporary government assistance is only a band-aid on a large wound.

If anyone can find a solution to the many challenges in agriculture right now, or at least get the ball rolling on possible solutions, it's farmers and ranchers. Let's get to work. ■


Having just one way to save – and one source of income – may not be enough to fulfill your vision for what retirement looks like. We can help fill the gaps with options that provide opportunities for low-risk growth and steady, reliable retirement income you won't outlive.

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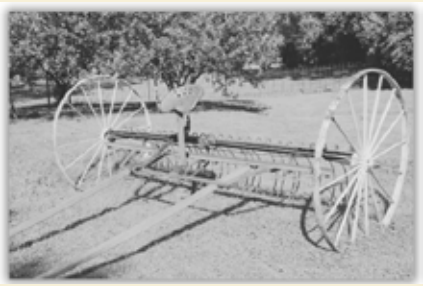
# 250 Years of Agricultural Advancement



**Pre 1776**
English settlers often used wood plows drawn by livestock to cultivate fields, while hoes, sickles, and flails were used to manage crops and harvest them.

**1790**
Roughly 90 percent of Americans worked in agriculture.

**1794**
Eli Whitney patents the cotton gin, a machine that revolutionized the production of cotton by greatly speeding up the processes of removing seeds from cotton fiber. Whitney's cotton gin also enabled cotton to become a successful cash crop in the southern U.S.

**1810**
First American agricultural periodical, the Agricultural Museum, began publication.

**1820**
Agriculture Committee, U.S. House of Representatives is established.

**1831**
Cyrus H. McCormick invents the first commercially successful reaper, a horse-drawn machine to harvest wheat. He patented the invention in 1834.

**1836**
Henry Harmon Spalding planted the first known potatoes in what is now Idaho near Lapwai.

**1837**
John Deere began working on and completed his first steel plow prototype in 1837 in Grand Detour, Illinois.

**1840s**
The growing use of factory-made agricultural machinery increased farmers' need for cash and encouraged commercial farming.

**1851**
The first refrigerated boxcar entered service in June 1851, on the Northern Railroad (New York). This "icebox on wheels" was a limited success.

**1862**
President Lincoln signs legislation establishing the U.S. Department of Agriculture. He called it "the people's department" since most Americans at the time were farmers.

**1870**
A single U.S. farm worker produced enough food to feed five people.

**1871**
Louis Pasteur invents pasteurization extending milks shelf life by using heat to kill bacteria.

**1874**
Joseph F. Glidden of DeKalb, Illinois, received a patent for early version of barbed wire.

**1880**
U.S. population reaches over 50 million. One in four farmers is a tenant, despite the Homestead Acts. With the development of barbed-wire fencing and windmills, plow farming reaches the Great Plains.

**1890**
Idaho entered the Union with agriculture already becoming a major economic driver. Irrigation projects would soon transform southern Idaho from sagebrush desert into productive farmland.

**1892**
John Froelich invents the first successful gasoline-powered engine that could be driven backwards and forwards – what we call a tractor today.

**1893**
U.S. experiences an economic crisis: 642 banks fail and 16,000 businesses close. As produce prices plummet, tens of thousands of small farms go under.

**1900**
There are 5.7 million farms in the U.S., with an average size of 138 acres.

**Early 1900s**
Federal reclamation projects and dams began turning thousands of acres of southern Idaho desert into farmland.

# 250 Years of Agricultural Advancement

**1900-1910**
George Washington Carver pioneered new uses for peanuts, sweet potatoes, and soybeans, thus helping to diversify southern agriculture.

**1902**
Reclamation Act funded the construction of Western dams and canals to transform arid lands into productive agricultural regions.

**1906**
Food and Drug Act passes as a landmark in food safety.

**1913**
The Haber process, also called the Haber-Bosch process, made it possible to produce ammonia, and thereby fertilize, on an industrial scale.

**1919**
Idaho Department of Agriculture is created by legislature.

**1920**
The number of farms has grown to 6.5 million and is home to roughly 32 million Americans. This would soon change. Migration, mostly by young people who left for the cities, escalates over the next ten years.

**1929**
Stock market crashes. The Great Depression begins.

**1930**
Only 21-24 percent of Americans work in agriculture.

**1932-36**
Drought and dust-bowl conditions developed.

**1933**
Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) initiated crop and marketing controls.

**1936**
Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act linked farm programs with conservation.

**1936**
Rural Electrification Act (REA) greatly improved quality of rural life.

**1939**
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation is founded as a general farm organization in Murtaugh, Idaho. It was created to give a voice to Idaho's farmers and ranchers.

**1940**
The downward spiral in the number of farms in the U.S. begins. Farmers would decrease from 17 percent of the population to less than 3 percent by 1981. The transformation from an agricultural society to an industrial and urban one was due in part to technological developments.

**1945-70**
Change from horses to tractors and increasing technological practices characterizes the second American agricultural revolution, and productivity per acre begins a sharp rise. During this time, the number of tractors on farms exceeds the number of horses and mules for the first time (1954), and 96 percent of cotton was harvested mechanically (1968).

**1954**
Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act (P.L. 480) facilitated agricultural exports and foreign aid.

**1967**
J.R. "Jack" Simplot and McDonald's founder, Ray Kroc, reached a handshake agreement for Simplot to supply frozen french fries to McDonald's.

**1970**
Approximately 5% of American population works in agriculture.

**1970**
Many large commercial farms have incorporated land from smaller farms, and farmhouses and barns are torn down to make room for more crops, changing the face of rural America. However, most farmers retain traditional agrarian values, according to informal surveys. As the cost of modern farming rises, farmers buy more land and equipment on bank loans.

**1974**
Farm size has more than doubled since 1940. The average farm is 385 acres, compared to 174 acres in 1940. The average cost of running a farm has increased almost 300 percent since 1950. Most farmers cannot pay the high production costs out of their yearly earnings and need to borrow.

**1976**
The demand for U.S. grain, which had increased during the 1970s due to poor grain harvests abroad, particularly in the U.S.S.R, falls dramatically. As a result, prices dropped, and annual farm income plummeted to $18.7 billion.

**1979**
A tractor procession of farmers from the American Agriculture Movement arrives in Washington DC to lobby Congress for higher prices. The protest leads Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland to propose a full-scale national dialogue on the future of American agriculture in order to develop a more workable policy.

**1980s**
Biotechnology became a viable technique for improving crop and livestock products

**1982**
Monsanto Company scientists became the first in the world to genetically modify a plant cell.

# 250 Years of Agricultural Advancement

**1982**
The annual income per farm, after expenses, is $9,000, while the average debt per farm, including mortgages, totals more than $30,000. Crop prices drop, and many farms and some small banks become bankrupt.

**1985**
The average size of U.S. farms has more than doubled since 1945, from 195 acres to 440 acres. In that time, the average cost of running a farm has increased almost 20 times, requiring an investment of $100,000 to $500,000. More than half of all farms are rented.

**1985**
Food Security Act lowered government farm supports, promoted exports, and set up the Conservation Reserve Program.

**1988**
Use of the Global Positioning System in agricultural applications, precision farming emerges.

**1990s**
Farmers are able to use satellite technology to see their farms from overhead, allowing for better tracking and planning.

**1994**
Genetically modified food sold with the release of the Flavr Savr tomato. The Flavr Savr was engineered to have a longer shelf life.

**1996**
The Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act (FAIR) is signed by President Bill Clinton. FAIR, the most ambitious federal farm program since the Roosevelt years, allows for domestic and export markets rather than the federal government to determine crop production. FAIR includes provisions for rural economic development and encourages farmers to practice conservation methods through incentives. It will remain in effect until 2003.

**2000**
Approximately 2% of Americans work in agriculture.

**2000s**
Software and mobile devices help farmers improve their harvests. Like many people in the U.S., the purchase of mobile devices escalates allowing more farmers to stay connected to colleagues while in the field. This also meant they had access to data needed while on-the-go and had the ability to place orders for seed or fertilizer at any time or in any place.

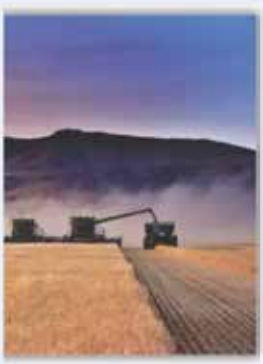
**2015**
Data revolutionizes farming potential and gives farmers the information needed to make more informed decisions while using resources more sustainably. For example, digital platforms bringing together data collection, agronomic modeling, and local weather monitoring are available, giving farmers a better understanding of their fields.

**2022**
Idaho farms start to grow hemp.

**2026**
Biologicals in agriculture are crop protection and enhancement products derived from living organisms or natural materials. Market estimates consistently point to 10-14% annual growth, and recent retailer surveys show that 86% of distributors plan to expand their biological offerings in 2026. These signals reflect a sector that is scaling with real momentum.

Robotics will integrate more deeply with the broader stack of AgTech innovations, variable-rate systems, AI scouting tools, and real-time sensing.

The rise of climate-resilient technologies: sensors that monitor moisture in real time, genetics built for temperature extremes, precision fertilization systems calibrated for variable rainfall, and platforms that model water availability weeks ahead.



Sources: USDA, PBS, AgAmerica, ICL-Group, Wikipedia, deere.com, American History Central, Library of Congress

# Parma celebrates 100 years of ag research

**By Sean Ellis**
*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

PARMA –In 2009, the University of Idaho's Parma Research and Extension Center was slated for closure and was, on paper, basically closed at one point.

A group of farmers and others who couldn't imagine life without the agricultural research station formed a coalition and lobbied to keep it open.

Seventeen years later, the center is thriving. University officials and ag industry stakeholders celebrated its 100th anniversary June 12.

In 2024, the university celebrated a $12 million revitalization of the Parma research center. That celebration marked the opening of a cutting-edge facility that houses the laboratory space for research in nematology, pomology, plant pathology, microbiology and hops.

Known as the Idaho Center for Plant and Soil Health, that modern 9,600-square-foot building replaced antiquated facilities that were more than 50 years old in some cases.

The 100th anniversary celebration included lunch, a featured program, tours and educational activities, insect gallery displays, research presentations and posters, stakeholder and industry booths and a historical photo display.


Photos by Paul Boehlke

TOP: **Part of the 200-acre Parma agricultural research station is shown here.**

The research center was actually established in 1925, but the university chose to celebrate its 100th year in 2026 to coincide with the 125th anniversary of the university's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS).

During the 100-year celebration, guest speakers reminded people that it was the agricultural industry itself that helped the Parma center pull a phoenix and rise from the ashes.


Photo by Sean Ellis

**Agricultural stakeholders recently celebrated 100 years of research at the University of Idaho's Parma center.**

In 2009, after CALS lost nearly $5 million in state funding for research efforts during the recession, the Parma center was slated for closure.

Farmers and other stakeholders formed a group called Treasure Valley Agricultural Coalition to save it. The group lobbied lawmakers and the governor on its behalf.

The group's recommendation "led to a whole bunch of activity that saved the station," Mike Thornton, the former Parma center superintendent, told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation.

"It was a dark time in some ways," he added, "but the outcome was better than anybody would have expected. It's really been a good story. It was amazing, from the fact that you got to see how much the industry valued this place and the length they were willing to go to keep it open."

TVAC members initially met in a room at the center that had no heat or water. They also put their own dollars toward bricks and mortar stuff, like keeping the lights on until a solution was found.

TVAC members provided $149,000 to the station over a three-year period beginning in 2010.

Eventually, a three-way partnership between the state, university and ag industry ended up saving the research center.

Members of TVAC were in 2014 presented with the prestigious Dean's Award for their role in helping save the Parma center and for their long-term support of CALS.

"This Parma Research and Extension Center continues to deliver the University of Idaho's land-grant mission by conducting world-class research and disseminating that knowledge and support to our Idaho producers," CALS Dean Leslie Edgar said during the 100-year celebration.

"At its core," she added, "this Parma R&E Center continues to focus on and ensure that we are meeting the agricultural needs of this state. This center has a rich history of providing critical information to growers across different cropping systems…."

Edgar thanked all the people who continue to support Parma and CALS itself.

"We're grateful for everyone who has advocated and continues to advocate not only for this research and Extension center, but for the work that we do as your land-grant university across this great state of Idaho," she said. "Together, we are able to transform the future of agricultural research in Idaho and beyond."

The 200-acre research center conducts research on many of the crops grown in the region, and Idaho, including beans, onions and other vegetables, hops, mint, tree fruit, wine and table grapes, cereals and seed crops.

The station has entomology, soils, horticulture, crop management, pomology, viticulture, nematology, and plant pathology programs.

Lt. Gov. Scott Bedke, a rancher and one of the speakers during the June 12 celebration, remembered hearing about the discussions to shutter the research center.

"In my experience, I couldn't even imagine closing these Extension services because they've been so valuable to me and mine," he said. "The research that you do here is very integral and absolutely cutting edge and it's important for the industry that we love."

He reminded people that "the most important industry in the state of Idaho is still agriculture and food processing" and said tax dollars are well invested in the university's various agricultural research centers.

The beginnings of the Parma research center stem from growers in the community asking for help in dealing with a serious infestation of alfalfa weevil. P

"It was threatening their crops and their livelihoods," said current Parma Station Director Chris Caron. "So farmers did what farmers do: They fought back and they pushed to find a solution."

Photo by Bill Schaefer

**From left, CALS Dean Leslie Edgar, Lt. Gov. Scott Bedke, and entomologist Armando Falcon-Brindis help celebrate 100 years of agricultural research at the university's Parma research station.**

"From day one," he added, "this place was put here to serve this agricultural community and it's the growers, both big and small, and the agricultural industry as a whole, that give this station its purpose." ■

# Country Chuckles

**By Jonny Hawkins**


# Idaho Farm Bureau
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# Raising the Lost Valley Reservoir

**By Paul Boehlke**
*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

Photos by Paul Boehlke

**An aerial view of the Lost Valley Reservoir.**

A plan that has been in the works for decades to increase the water storage capacity of the Lost Valley Reservoir in western Idaho could be close to finally being realized.

The reservoir sits between the Seven Devils Mountains and the West Central Mountains just five miles off highway 95. It's a private reservoir that feeds the Weiser River in both Adams and Washington counties.

The dam is well over 100 years old and way past due to be raised, said Irv Leen, vice president of the Lost Valley Reservoir Board (LVRB) and a member of the Washington County Farm Bureau board. He said it's rated to be in poor condition by the state.

The small earthen dam was built for irrigation in 1910 by the Mesa Orchard Co. Plans to raise the dam have been in the works for decades.

"We're under pressure to get this done, because we'll either lose this dam as far as being able to use it – they'll take it away from us if we don't fix it – and it's kind of a no-brainer to go back in and fix the outlet works and make a bigger spillway," said Dale Darton, president of the Lost Valley Reservoir Board.

Leen said the dam was raised in the 1930s and raised a little bit more in the 1950s. It holds 10,000 acre-feet of water.

"We want to raise the dam high enough up that it will store an additional 20,000 feet," he said.

The plan is to raise the dam 30 feet, tripling the water storage capacity of the reservoir. Because of the water level rise, some of the roads would have to be moved to higher ground, as well as some of the popular campgrounds surrounding the reservoir.

Other campgrounds are already set back far enough that the new water levels would not affect them.

Barton says the reservoir is essential economically to the Council Valley, Salubria Valley around Cambridge and Middle Valley near Midvale.

He says the existing outflow pipe is 36 inches wide, which isn't large enough to meet peak demand during irrigation season. He'd like to see that doubled to 6 feet.

The age of the dam itself is also a problem, with deteriorating concrete and wooden flash boards that the dam tender must change manually to adjust the spillway level.

In high water years, a lot of water is released very early from the reservoir that could have been stored for irrigation use if it had more capacity.

Barton also says the archaic system makes it difficult to deal with the runoff during high water years.

"We've got to get updated to a new spillway," he said. "This spillway is probably 20 feet wide. and the new spillway is going to be, at the high level, it's going to be like 100 feet wide."

He says the safety improvements plus the capacity increase to 30,000 acre-feet would allow for better flood control.

Leen agrees.

"We wouldn't be flooding out Council and Cambridge and Midvale and Weiser and all the rest of the towns down there," he said.

The estimated cost for the project right now is a little over $13 million, which Leen said includes the Environmental Impact Statement, the engineering, and the construction of a whole new dam.

"The 13 million is actually a middle of the road figure" and it could end up being higher, he said.

He says the cost per acre foot of the added water storage is likely the least expensive of any proposed water storage project in the state.

The EIS also addresses the local northern Idaho ground squirrel, which is listed as a threatened species. It only lives in Adams and Valley counties.

The funding process is complicated and still ongoing, with loans and grants from the state of Idaho, the Idaho Water Resource Board, and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's small storage grant program.

The LVRB also sold what are referred to as d-shares, which are rights to the additional water that the reservoir would hold.

If everything goes smoothly, construction could start as early as fall 2027, though Leen said 2028 is more likely.

Because downstream irrigators depend on the water, people who support raising the dam are hoping the main construction phase can be completed within one year, so there is no interruption of the water supply.

"If we were to lose this dam, this water, those areas ag-wise would dry up as far as the crops," said Leen.

He also said the deeper reservoir would mean cooler water in the Weiser River, which would benefit fish, help keep moss out of the water and provide more water for the U.S. Forest Service while fighting wildfires.

Leen said there's also been concerns about the reservoir staying private. The dam itself sits on federal ground, but LVRB members have an easement for that and they also own part of the land the reservoir sits on, plus water rights to store the water.

Washington County Farm Bureau President Chris Leverenz said Idaho Farm Bureau policy is very strong in support of additional water storage.

"It just would alleviate a lot of the strain on dry years like we're experiencing this year," he said. "This project for the farmers in the Weiser River drainage area is very beneficial. There always seems to be more need for that water … not just from the farmers but from the general population as well." ■

**A plan is underway to increase water storage capacity in the Lost Valley Reservoir.**

# BUCK THE TREND

## IDAHO FARMER & RANCHER MENTAL HEALTH FORUM

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW:

Buck The Trend (BTT) is a two-day training designed to address mental health challenges specific to farmers and ranchers. The training is directed in small, peer-focused groups and hosted in a safe and relaxed setting. Experienced counselors lead the training. The 20 attendees selected for this training will be equipped with the tools and skills to improve their own mental health and help those around them.

The BTT training is designed for individuals who have a basic understanding and awareness of their own mental wellbeing, and who are motivated to help others in their community.

The ideal candidate for this training is an Idahoan who has looked around their farm, or the industry as a whole and decided to make a change, for themselves and their family and friends. The training will be held in Twin Falls, November 13-15, 2026.

Visit farm.idaho.gov to learn more and apply.

BTT Buck the Trend Mental Health Forum

IDAHO Farm & Ranch Center

## LINK TO BTT TRAINING WEBPAGE:

https://agri.idaho.gov/marketing/farm-ranch-center/farm-ranch-center-buck-the-trend/

IDAHO STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

# Mental Health Training for Farmers and Ranchers Coming to Idaho this November

Anna Lickely, ISDA Farm and Ranch Center Program Manager

The Idaho State Department of Agriculture's Farm and Ranch Center, with support from agricultural groups across the state, is bringing Buck The Trend (BTT), a training focused on farmer and rancher mental health, to Idaho. The training will be held in Twin Falls Nov. 13-15. As troubling factors such as drought, volatile markets, high input costs and high land values impact our agricultural industry, support for the farmers and families bearing these burdens is

Anna Lickley, ISDA Farm and Ranch Center Program Manager

BTT is a two-day training designed to address mental health challenges specific to farmers and ranchers. It is founded on the idea that small, peer-focused groups, hosted in a safe and relaxed setting, and led by experienced counselors are an effective way to nurture conversations, build skills, and affect positive change. The aim of the training is to equip attendees with the tools and skills to improve their own mental health, and help those around them. Writer and ranch hand Maddy Butcher, created the training after seeing an increase in suicides and mental health challenges in her ranching community. “While people in the agriculture community are extremely talented and resourceful, there’s not a way for us to get better skills and tools for addressing what ails us specific to mental health,” Butcher said.

The training focuses on building real tools and skills to navigate and manage stress. Butcher says that it’s difficult to appreciate the stress that farmers and ranchers are under. An unpredictable and often overflowing to-do list coupled with volatile markets and daily uncontrollable factors such as weather issues can put a real strain on producers. Butcher said, “The training approaches the topic of mental health from a variety of angles with interactive sessions and topics ranging from myths related to therapy and suicidal ideation, to brain development and cultural norms that contribute to poor mental patterns.”

Dan Flitner, Oregon rancher and past BTT participant, said his journey to better understand his own mental health started when he realized he didn’t have the mental and emotional skills to be the father and husband that he wanted for his family. Flitner said, “The training provided me with an opportunity to work in a group setting. It actually felt really good to learn from and share with others, even though it was hard.” In Flitner’s opinion, the ideal candidate for the Idaho BTT training is involved in agriculture and is curious about learning tools to build strong mental health.

Flitner, Butcher and the BTT team are hosting a workshop in Oregon next month. Flitner says that he hopes the training will help producers be more open about their struggles, “I hope that openness will help those who are in pain to know that change is within their power.”

BTT is a traveling workshop that serves agricultural communities across the western United States. The Idaho training is limited to 20 attendees, and free to attend thanks to the support of agricultural groups across the state. Learn more by visiting the Farm and Ranch Center webpage, **farm.idaho.gov.**

IDAHO Farm & Ranch Center

# Study uses virtual fencing to reduce conflict between cattle and recreationists

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

SALMON – Cattle and recreationists have similar tastes when choosing their favorite spots on public land — flat, shady ground along lush streambanks.

For people seeking to connect with nature, the experience may be diminished when cows wander through a favorite primitive campsite. From a rancher's perspective, recreationists who forget to close cattle gates can be a persistent headache.

A new University of Idaho grazing study aims to help cattle ranchers and outdoor enthusiasts coexist in better harmony on public lands while also benefiting the environment. They are using virtual fencing technology to guide the grazing of cattle.

U of I rangeland scientists are partnering on the study with a rancher who uses a federal grazing allotment in the Pahsimeroi Valley south of Salmon, seeking to improve grazing management and conserve riparian areas.

The research team, led by Melinda Ellison, an Extension range livestock specialist, has fitted 550 of the rancher's mother cows, each of which has a calf, with radio collars that emit a warning sound followed by an electric pulse as the cow draws nearer to a previously programmed GPS boundary.

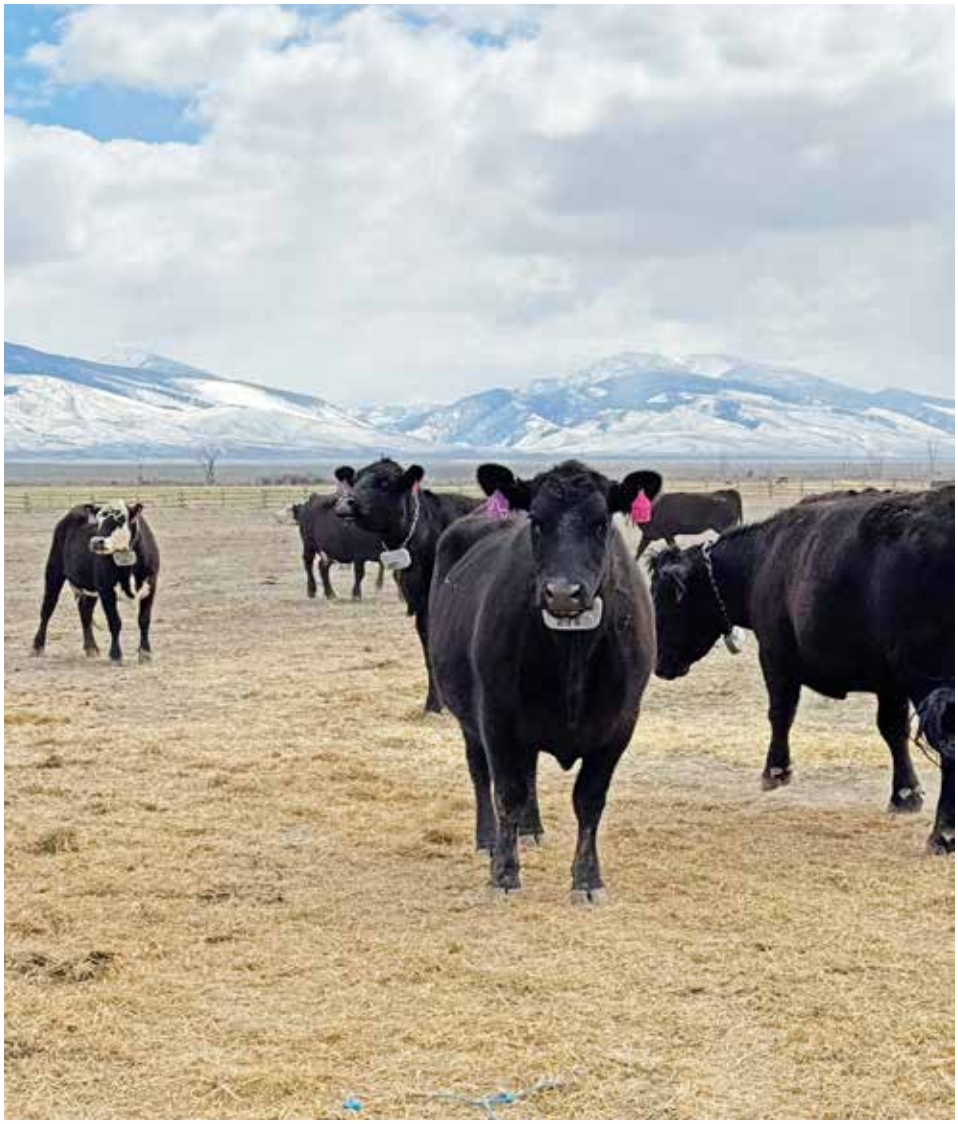
The noise and pulse are meant to act as a deterrent for the cattle from entering the space.

The signal is transmitted from a portable

LEFT: **A cow is fitted with a virtual fencing collar.** University of Idaho photos

*"We've seen that where cattle spend the most time is not where they're doing most of their grazing. We're starting to learn little things like that by evaluating the data we've collected so far."*

*– Melinda Ellison, U of I Extension range livestock specialist*



**Cattle wearing virtual fencing collars graze federal land.**

cellular base station, and grazing boundaries can be easily adjusted.

"We're going to try to manage cattle away from those recreational areas and see if we have a lower rate of muti-use challenges," Ellison said. "We're also interested in the best way to manage vegetation in the areas where we exclude cattle. We'll also be looking at how animals utilize the landscape as a whole when they are wearing a collar."

The participating rancher will make management decisions, such as where to allow cattle to graze and which recreational areas to exclude. Cattle grazing maps will also be adjusted for rangeland health considerations.

Researchers hope the project will provide a case study demonstrating that much of the permanent interior fencing could be removed from federal grazing allotments and be effectively replaced with virtual fencing.

The first season of the planned two-year study started in mid-April and will conclude in October. The Foundation for America's Public Lands funded the project with a $235,000 grant.

Furthermore, the ability to track livestock movements via the collars will provide the team with insights into other research questions. The researchers want to use data from their collared cattle to better understand important animal traits and to assess different management approaches.

"We've seen that where cattle spend the most time is not where they're doing most of their grazing," Ellison said. "We're starting to learn little things like that by evaluating the data we've collected so far."

The research team also includes K. Scott Jensen, an area Extension educator specializing in rangeland management and livestock grazing; Hadley Dotts, a research associate; and three graduate students — Henning Krúger and Maxine Walas, master's students in animal science, and Abigail McClaflin, who is pursuing a master's in water resources.

Ellison began research using virtual fencing in 2023, when she started a project on federal grazing allotments through which a wildfire had burned the previous grazing season, and in subsequent years, combined targeted grazing with collared cattle and aerial herbicide spraying to control cheatgrass.

The team also used the collars to keep cattle away from critical fish habitat during the spawning season.

Ellison is also the lead on a separate, $181,000 grant from the Foundation for America's Public Lands also involving virtual fencing. The project, scheduled to begin in March 2027, will entail grazing collared cattle in strips along roadways to establish wildfire fuel breaks. ■

Photos by Lauren King

**Western larch and Douglas fir seedlings.**

# Get to know your future seedlings

**By Lauren King**
*University of Idaho*

Summer is the time when you are out on your property, doing the never-ending yardwork and making decisions on what reforestation and restoration work you will be doing the following year.

The summer months are a good indicator of the composition of the vegetation across your landscape. Determining what species you want to plant and where is a critical part of the planning process. The other critical part, which is often overlooked, is where you get your seedlings from.

There are numerous nurseries across the state of Idaho (and surrounding states) that will have plant material that can be used for various plantings. Before jumping in headfirst, here are some things to consider.

**Seed source** – Where the seed came from, how similar is that site to your own property (elevation and climate), seed transfer zone compatibility and physical location. For large contract orders, often nurseries allow you to provide your own seed. This might not be possible for everyone, but col-

lecting seed from your property is a great way to ensure seedlings will be adapted to your site.

You can also purchase seed that fits within your properties' scope that may be better adapted than what the nursery is growing in their speculation crop. If you are collecting your own seed, have a game plan for not only collection, but also processing and storage. If you are wanting to provide your own seed to a nursery to have them grow it, plan at least two years in advance to collect the seed and communicate with the nursery to make sure they will have space and your seed is adequate. What seems like a "large order" for you, may be very small in the nursery's mind.

**What size of seedlings** – Often, smaller seedlings are cheaper and have slightly less chance of survival than larger planting stock. The larger the seedling is (plug or container), the more expensive it is. Seeds do not turn into seedlings overnight and they can take 6 months to years to get to the desired specifications for sale depending on the species.

**The nursery's specialty** – If a nursery specializes in conifers, or riparian plants or forbs, they likely have a good reputation with those species and a long-standing track record. I'm not saying a forest nursery can't grow wetland plants or vice versa; it is just a consideration to take as a consumer purchasing any product. Typically, you wouldn't want to order raw oysters from your local steakhouse, but you never know, it could also be the best in town.

**Ponderosa pine seedlings.**

**The nursery's location** – While we can't judge on location alone, this is something to keep in mind. If the nursery is down the road, or within a reasonable driving distance, it may be more cost effective to pick them up. Some nurseries may only allow pickups or shipping, depending on their policies.

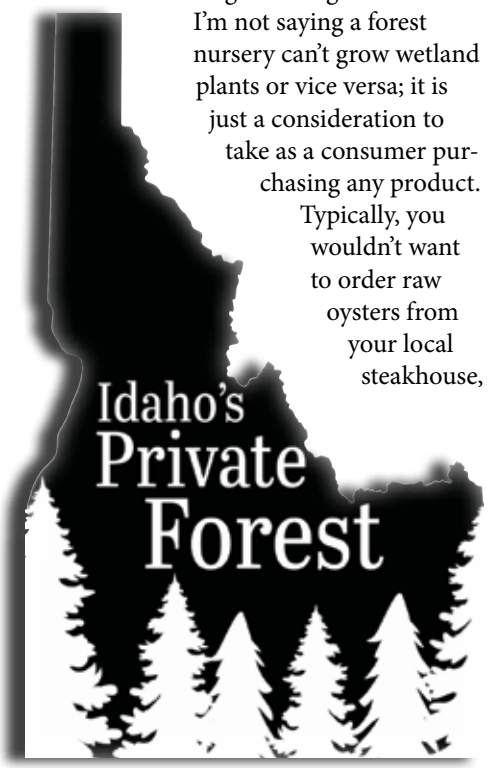
Freight costs will also go up substantially the larger the order (in both quantity and size of plant materials). A 5' tall tree is very different from a 5 cubic inch plug. Even if a nursery is nearby, the convenience of having plant materials shipped is still something to keep in mind. Shipping seedlings and plants is a common practice and shouldn't be of concern.

**Nurseries are a wealth of knowledge, but they aren't doubling as project managers.** Ask questions to make the best possible decisions for your property to protect your long-term investment, but don't expect them to plan (or plant) your reforestation or restoration project for you either.

How do you figure out if the nursery is right for you? Nurseries can be found a variety of ways. They often have websites and are on social media, but word of mouth is also a great option for finding hidden gems. Your local Extension office can also help provide insight into what nurseries may have planting stock available and when the best time to order and plant is.

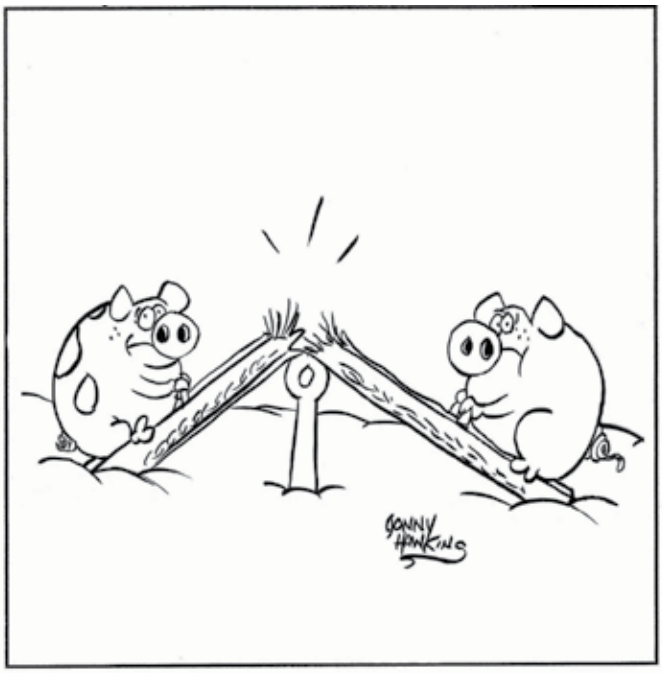
University of Idaho Extension is hosting multiple nursery tours this August in North Idaho. These tours will be an opportunity for landowners to have facetime with nursery growers and get to know them and their processes for growing seedlings. These tours are designed to help landowners be effective land managers and forest stewards while planting for reforestation, restoration and ornamental purposes. ■

*(Lauren King is a University of Idaho Extension educator in Benewah County. She can be reached at laurenking@uidaho.edu).*



# Country Chuckles

## By Jonny Hawkins



# Harvest the Future

## Idaho debuts new agriculture license plate


**By Cassidey Plum**
*Idaho Agriculture in the Classroom*

As of July 1, Idaho drivers have a new way to show their support for Idaho agriculture and agricultural education.

The updated Idaho Agriculture license plate, featuring the state's top agricultural commodities, is now available through county DMV offices across Idaho.

While the design is new, the mission behind the plate remains unchanged: supporting agricultural literacy through Idaho Agriculture in the Classroom.

The Idaho Legislature established the Idaho Agriculture license plate in 2000. Since then, proceeds from plate sales and renewals have served as the primary funding source for Idaho Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC), a statewide nonprofit dedicated to helping students better understand agriculture and natural resources.

For every $35 plate sold, $25 directly supports Idaho Agriculture in the Classroom programs.

The redesign comes 26 years after the original plate was introduced and reflects both Idaho's agricultural heritage and the importance of educating future generations about the industry's role in everyday life.

Leading the design effort was Boise graphic designer Shailey Katsilometes, owner of Shay K Creative. Katsilometes grew up on her family's farm in Murtaugh before earning a degree in graphic design from Boise State University and building a career in the design industry.

Her agricultural background provided a unique perspective as she worked to create a design that reflects Idaho agriculture and the mission of Idaho Agriculture in the Classroom.

*"This wasn't a decision that the Idaho Ag in the Classroom board took lightly. We really wanted to make sure that we were encompassing Idaho agriculture and tell the story of AITC all on one license plate."*

*– Heidi Martin, president, Idaho Agriculture in the Classroom*

The new plate highlights Idaho's top five agricultural commodities by value: dairy, cattle, potatoes, hay and wheat. Together, they represent industries that contribute significantly to Idaho's economy while helping define the state's identity.

"This wasn't a decision that the Idaho Ag in the Classroom board took lightly," said Heidi Martin, president of Idaho Agriculture in the Classroom. "We really wanted to make sure that we were encompassing Idaho agriculture and tell the story of AITC all on one license plate."

The redesign also introduces a new tagline: "Harvest the Future."

The phrase reflects the purpose behind the plate and the work of Idaho Agriculture in the Classroom. Today, many students are several generations removed from the farm and have limited opportunities to learn where their food, fiber, fuel and natural resources originate.

Agricultural literacy helps bridge that gap by connecting students to the people, practices and industries that support their daily lives.

Idaho Agriculture in the Classroom works to increase agricultural literacy by supporting educators across the state. The organization provides classroom resources, lesson plans, grants, teacher workshops and hands-on learning opportunities for students from pre-kindergarten through high school.

When Idahoans purchase an agriculture license plate, they help fund those efforts while connecting students to an industry that remains deeply rooted in Idaho's history, economy and way of life.

Agriculture contributes billions of dollars to the state's economy each year, and the plate helps ensure future generations understand the people, products and natural resources that continue to shape Idaho.

The new Idaho Agriculture license plate is available through local DMV offices statewide. ■

*Cassidey Plum is the state director for Idaho Agriculture in the Classroom.*

# Letter from Congress asks for help for U.S. sugar growers

**By Sean Ellis**
*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

POCATELLO – More than 100 members of Congress signed a letter that urges U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer to protect America's sugar beet and sugar cane farmers from "unfair and discriminatory trade practices by foreign sugar-producing countries."

Sugar beets are one of Idaho's main crops and impact the state's economy to the tune of billions of dollars per year.

"We are gravely concerned about the surge in unfairly traded foreign sugar imports, which, along with higher input costs, are plunging the domestic industry into crisis and presenting an imminent threat to the industry's long-term viability," the May 20 letter states.

According to the bipartisan and bicameral letter, which was signed by 110 members of Congress, sugar farming families and workers in the United States support more than 151,000 jobs and generate more than $23 billion in economic activity each year.

The Snake River Sugarbeet Growers As-

sociation represents about 600 farmers in Idaho, Oregon and Washington that plant a combined 180,000 acres of sugar beets each year. About 500 of those farms and 170,000 of those acres are in Idaho.

Idaho ranks No. 2 in the nation in total sugar beet production.

"Our industry is thrilled to see the bipartisan support for this letter," said SRSGA Executive Director Samantha Parrott. "It means a lot to see the support we have on the Hill for our industry."

The letter was endorsed by American Farm Bureau Federation, SRSGA and other agricultural organizations, as well as all four members of Idaho's congressional delegation.

It asks the USTR to investigate countries that the U.S. sugar industry believes are using unfair trade practices and heavily subsidizing their sugar growers to create more production.

"And then they're dumping that sugar on the world market and it's finding its way into the United States," Parrott said.

"We strongly urge you to investigate these unfair trading practices that disadvantage our domestic sugar industry and take decisive action as appropriate," the letter states.

The letter also asks the USTR to look at the U.S. sugar program's tier two tariff rate.

The United States has a sugar policy that is outlined in the farm bill and regulates the flow of sugar into the country.

The U.S. sugar program supports flexible domestic marketing allotments and, through the use of tariff rate quotas, or tier one tariff rates, permits specified volumes of sugar shipments from 40 nations.

A separate and higher tier two tariff rate is intended to prevent an excess supply of sugar from destabilizing the U.S. market. This tier two tariff rate has not been adjusted since 2000 and, according to the letter, has "become wholly ineffective in protecting our domestic industry from excess foreign supply."

*"Growers really rely on sugar beets to help them pay the bills, so it's such a staple commodity for these small family farms here in Idaho."*

*– Samantha Parrott, Executive Director, SRSGA*

As a result, the letter adds, "Record levels of unfairly traded sugar have entered the U.S. since 2023, flooding the domestic market, depressing prices, jeopardizing the financial stability of our domestic producers, and threatening forfeitures."

During a recent meeting with fellow Idaho Farm Bureau Federation members, Amalgamated Sugar Co. board chairman Mike Garner talked about the severe financial challenge that Idaho sugar beet farmers are facing right now.

"We're in survival mode right now," he said. "We're consolidating where we can, we're cutting back where we can without hurting ourselves."

Sugar beets are one of Idaho's top crops in terms of total acres and revenue and are typically one of the state's most reliable crops, Parrott said.

"Growers really rely on sugar beets to help them pay the bills, so it's such a staple commodity for these small family farms here in Idaho," she said.

"It's a big commodity in the state and there are a lot of people that depend on it," Garner said.

Parrott said U.S. sugar beet farmers are facing dire times financially because of the unfair trading practices and out-of-date tier two tariff rate. She estimates SRSGA growers lost between $500 and $700 per acre in 2025.

"The market is way over-supplied right now and that has really tanked the price," she said. "It's been tough for our growers." ■

**A sugar beet field in Idaho is harvested in these photos by CB Creative.**

# Idaho supports **REAL SUGAR** vs. artificial sweeteners

**By Sean Ellis**
*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

POCATELLO – Idaho lawmakers have approved a measure that asks the federal government to use real sugar in school meals rather than artificial sweeteners.

House Joint Memorial 10 sailed through the Idaho Legislature with support from both sides of the aisle. It urges Congress and federal agencies to prohibit artificial sweeteners in federally funded school meal programs and instead to prioritize the use of real sugar.

Sugar beets are one of the state's major crops and those beets are turned into sugar at processing plants in Idaho, which is the nation's second-largest producer of sugar beets.

"There was bipartisan support in our state legislature for this effort and we're thrilled to see it go through," said Samantha Parrott, executive director of the Snake River Sugarbeet Growers Association, which represents about 600 farmers in Idaho, Oregon and Washington that plant a combined 180,000 acres of sugar beets each year.

About 500 of those farms and 170,000 of those acres are in Idaho.

The joint memorial calls on Congress, USDA and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to make this change. Because school meal standards are set at the federal level, the memorial serves as a formal request from the state of Idaho for this policy reform.

Parrott said the sugar beet industry wants to be clear that it isn't trying to encourage more sugar in school meals.

"We're simply saying that products served to children in public schools should prioritize real ingredients," Parrott said. "If something needs to be sweetened, we believe real sugar — which comes from plants and has been part of the human diet for generations — is the appropriate choice in school meals."

"Our focus is specifically on what is being served to kids during the school day," she added. "The joint memorial sends a signal that when it comes to children, school nutrition standards should emphasize transparency and familiar ingredients that families understand and expect."

Parrott said that adults are free to make their own dietary choices, but many parents prefer that artificial sweeteners not be included in foods served through federally funded school meal programs.

"These are mass meals that are being served to kids … and we feel like artificial sweeteners should not be a part of that," Parrott said.

She also pointed out that real sugar is a key ingredient in a lot of food products and is a highly sought-after commodity in the world.

"We've never pushed people eating more sugar," Parrott said. "We say, sugar in moderation as part of a balanced diet."

The joint memorial was sponsored in the House by Rep. Jaron Crane and it was carried in the Senate by President Pro Tempore Kelly Anthon.

The measure is a common-sense approach to school nutrition, Crane said in an SRSGA news release.

"Parents expect transparency in what is being served to their children at school," he said. "Protecting children and ensuring that school nutrition standards reflect the values of American families should be a national priority."

According to the SRSGA, sugar beets are a billion-dollar industry in Idaho. Amalgamated Sugar Co., which turns the beets into sugar, employs thousands of people at its processing plants in Idaho and is one of the state's largest private employers.

The Amalgamated processing facilities provide good jobs for rural communities, Parrott said, and sugar beets play a major role in Idaho agriculture.

"Our sugar beet industry is really the heartbeat of the rural part of Idaho and … helps keep our economy strong," she said.

"House Joint Memorial 10 sends a clear message that Idaho stands behind its agricultural producers," Anthon said in the news release. "Sugar beets are a critical part of Idaho's economy, supporting family farms, processors, and rural communities across our state. When we advocate for real, Idaho-grown products in federal nutrition policy, we are also supporting one of our most important agricultural industries." ■

**A sugar beet field in Idaho is harvested in this photo by CB Creative.**

# New curriculum highlights Idaho's iconic potatoes

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

DAYTON – Harold B. Lee Elementary School third graders gave answers ranging from accurate to far-fetched in response to University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development Coordinator Cherie Carter's question: "Where do potatoes come from?"

"New Jersey!" "The grocery store!" "Idaho!" "The forest!"

Carter, who is based in Franklin County, has recently been visiting elementary classrooms in the Preston and Westside school districts to guest teach Extension's new ePotato curriculum. The multimedia content was designed for use by Idaho school teachers and 4-H leaders and meets content standards for a host of third- through fifth-grade subjects, including math, science, language arts, geography and social studies.

EPotato includes five, one-hour lessons and may be downloaded for free. It's the first installment in a series of planned Extension lessons to educate Idaho youth about the major crops raised in their own communities.

While agriculture is a foreign concept to many of Carter's students before starting ePotato, it's a way of life for some others. For example, third-grader Avonlea Beutler had a very specific, informed take on Carter's question about where potatoes come from.

"Circle A Farms!" the girl said confidently, naming her family's business.

Beutler explained that her family raises potatoes, among many other commodities, and hosts an annual Potato Day attended by about 100 community members who visit the farm to buy fresh potatoes and sample free, homemade fries.

Carter planned to make three additional visits to Harold B. Lee Elementary to teach the remaining ePotato lessons, including a few memorable hands-on activities.

"We'll use a potato to make a lightbulb turn on," Carter said. "One lesson talks about the nutrition of potatoes and different recipes to try. I'm thinking of making something with potatoes and bringing it to the kids."

Matt Fisher, a 4-H area Extension educator focusing on agriculture and STEM, and Siew Guan Lee, an Extension educator in Twin Falls County specializing in health and nutrition, collaborated on developing ePotato.

Fisher identified the need for new curriculum about major Idaho crops after conducting a community needs assessment in the fall of 2022. As a starting point for their project, they received permission to incorporate a seldom-used potato curriculum developed in 2018 by Extension and U of I's College of Education, Health and Human Sciences.


Submitted photo

**EPotato creators Siew Guan Lee and Matt Fisher staff a table to raise awareness about the potato-themed curriculum they created, at the UI Extension Idaho Potato Conference in January in Pocatello.**

Learning modules cover how potatoes are grown, the history and geography of different varieties, why Idaho is well suited for growing potatoes, the tuber's nutritional component and health benefits, how to prepare healthy and tasty meals using spuds and more.

"A goal for Siew and myself is that kids should be more aware of what is around them. If they drive by a field, they may say, 'Oh, that's a potato field,'" Fisher said. "Idaho is known for its potatoes, and I don't think most youth are aware of what potatoes do for the state, what type of potatoes there are, where they are grown or anything like that."

The UI Extension Publications team oversaw programming of ePotato interactive lessons and produced videos associated with each module.

Scientists including UI Extension Potato Storage Specialist Nora Olsen vetted the curriculum for accuracy. Fourth-grade teachers in the Twin Falls School District and a couple of 4-H coordinators helped test various parts of the lessons.

Fisher and Lee published ePotato in November 2025 and received an internal Extension grant to publicize the program at agricultural and Extension conferences, 4-H in-service meetings, Ag in the Classroom summer workshops hosted for Idaho teachers and youth education-centered events.

Idaho's Ag in the Classroom program has helped with promoting ePotato, which has already been downloaded by teachers in school districts throughout the state, 4-H leaders, parents who homeschool their children and others.

Fisher and Lee plan to create future curriculum teaching children about sugar beets and wheat. ■

Photos by University of Idaho

**University of Idaho graduate students visit the Wada Farms fresh potato packing facility in Pingree during a tour of the entire potato supply chain, which made stops in communities from the Treasure Valley through eastern Idaho.**

# Tour introduces grad students to careers in Idaho spud industry

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

MOSCOW, Idaho – Ten University of Idaho graduate students who participated in a recent tour of the state's potato industry witnessed the full supply chain, from early seed production through shipping fresh and frozen spud products to buyers.

In 2014, potato farmers Doug Gross, of Wilder, and Jeff Harper, of Mountain Home, established the Idaho Potato Graduate Industry Program Endowment to recognize the important role that the potato industry plays in Idaho agriculture and the ways in which the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS) assists the potato industry in teaching, research and Extension.

Every two years, the tour exposes U of I graduate students to all aspects of the Idaho potato industry, including potato production, storage, biotechnology, fresh pack systems, processing, equipment, irrigation, food science, seed certification and production, marketing and agri-businesses involved in crop research. The goal is to raise their awareness of job opportunities in potato production.

The 2026 tour — hosted May 18-21 for six doctoral students and four graduate students — was led by Nora Olsen, potato specialist, and Gustavo Teixeira, potato postharvest physiologist who holds the Wayne and Peggy Thiessen Potato Research Professorship Endowment.

The tour started at the Idaho Potato Commission (IPC) offices in Eagle, where CEO Jamey Higham provided industry updates, before moving on to Gross Farms in Wilder.

"The whole idea was to expose young people to the industry because we must have a replenishment of workers," said Gross. "Most college kids or graduate students don't get the opportunity to get out into the businesses and see what's really going on, what our concerns are as farmers and what needs to be worked on."

At U of I's Parma Research and Extension Center, Armando Falcon-Brindis, an Extension specialist in entomology, provided a hands-on activity identifying important aphids in potatoes. Next, at Simplot Plant Sciences, they discussed how the company is using biotechnology for disease resistance and quality.

The group also visited Harper's Flying H Farms and had the chance to dig in fields and see newly forming tubers before witnessing how fries are made at Lamb Weston in Twin Falls. The next stop was learning about proper potato storage management with Agri-Stor in Hansen.

At U of I's Aberdeen Research and Extension Center, Operations Manager Chad Jackson explained the facility's many contributions to Idaho agriculture, including its role in developing russet potatoes for the processing markets.

The students then stopped at Wada Farms in Pingree to tour a large fresh potato packing plant that ships product throughout the world. Kip Yeates, vice president of fresh operations with Wada Farms, explained U of I researchers, including Olsen, provide their business with invaluable services, including research into the physiology of fresh potatoes in transit.

Managers of Blackfoot-based Spudnik Equipment, Evan Steel and Andrew Blight, showed the students how modern equipment used in potato production, storage and harvesting is manufactured.

**University of Idaho graduate students learn about the potato supply chain during a tour of the Wada Farms fresh potato packing facility in Pingree.**

The last day of the tour was dedicated to seed potato production. Students visited Atchley's Flying A Ranch in Ashton, where tissue cultures produced at U of I's Seed Potato Germplasm Laboratory in Moscow are raised in a sterile greenhouse to produce the earliest generation of disease-free potato seed by Emma Atchley and Laura Pickard.

At the final stop, Idaho Crop Improvement Association in Idaho Falls, Southeast Area Manager Alan Westra highlighted Idaho's seed certification authority, which has ensured a high-quality seed supply for Idaho for more than 78 years.

Students who participated in the tour have already made significant contributions toward Idaho agriculture. Adison Reyes, a doctoral student from Ecuador working under Alexander Karasev, a distinguished professor of plant virology, has been using next-generation sequencing technology to discover new viruses and viruses associated with various crops. He's been working primarily in legumes and grapevines. The tour allowed Reyes to experience new facets of the agricultural industry.

"It's an amazing opportunity for learning the whole process, from the marketing part through food processing and the whole production process; it's just amazing and highly technical," Reyes said.

Alexandra Sims, a master's student from Connecticut studying plant pathology under Kasia Duellman, an Extension plant pathology specialist based in Idaho Falls, has studied a fungal disease called Fusarium dry rot that affects potatoes from the field through storage,

"This was an opportunity to see a side of the industry that I hadn't seen yet — a bit of the agricultural equipment, a bit of the farming and planting," Sims said.

Sims was especially interested in seeing advanced potato storages during the tour.

"I know a lot about the things that can go wrong in storage facilities, but I got to learn a lot about how to make everything go right," Sims said.

"The tour is an in-person, face-to-face experience," Teixeira said. "They can talk to growers, they can talk to processors, and they learn a lot during the process. It's also a good venue for the students to get in contact with the industry so they may be hired in the future." ■

# Classifieds

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2006 Chevy 3500, 4wd airpak welder, pipe press, LN25, 50hp pump, inventory, $45,000 Salmon, ID 208-766-7396

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**Episode 111 - In The Shoes Of A Legislative Advocate**

Ever wonder what actually happens behind the scenes during a legislative session? In this episode of Dirt Road Discussions, we sit down with Braden Jensen and Dexton Lake, who work for the Governmental Affairs Team for the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation.

Braden and Dexton pull back the curtain on the ins and outs of the state legislature, sharing what it really takes to navigate the session.