

# GEM STATE **Producer** Idaho Farm Bureau

March 2026 • Volume 30 Issue 2

## Report Shows Financial Condition of Idaho Ag

**Legislative  
Conference,  
10**

**Idaho ag  
exports, 15**

**FFA 'Day on  
the Hill', 18**



## Momentum is building for agriculture

Lately, farmers and ranchers have had no shortage of reasons to feel frustrated. We're facing a tough economy, rising costs and prolonged uncertainty around key policies that shape our ability to plan for the future.

But in recent weeks, we've also seen some encouraging progress.

From progress on the farm bill to new trade agreements and growing momentum for year-round E15, there's been meaningful movement

that shows agriculture's priorities are being heard.

It doesn't mean the work is finished, but it does mean momentum is building, and that matters.

### Progress on farm bill

Congress has taken an important step forward on the farm bill. Last week, House Agriculture Chairman Glenn "GT" Thompson released updated farm bill text, and the committee is preparing to mark it up. We're still

See **DUVALL**, page 6

# The President's Desk

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



## Times are tough in farm country

Two recent separate reports come to the same conclusion: farmers are under the gun financially and there isn't much light at the end of the proverbial tunnel.

The University of Idaho's "Financial Condition of Idaho Agriculture: 2025" report, released to lawmakers during the first part of January, shows that Idaho farmers and ranchers brought in a record \$12.1 billion in farm-gate receipts in 2025.

But that number, just by itself, is misleading,

as the report's authors pointed out to legislators.

Cattle and calves is pretty much the lone bright spot in agriculture right now and accounted for much of Idaho's overall increase in farm-gate revenue last year.

It's important to keep in mind that while farm-gate revenue for cattle is increasing, it hasn't increased enough to cover increases in capital costs when adjusted for inflation.

See **DORSEY**, page 6

# Inside Farm Bureau

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



## Suits and boots

As a little boy, I remember how valuable cowboy boots seemed—after all, it's tough to be a real cowboy without them.

The funny thing is that my earliest memories are of them always falling off while horseback. It wasn't until my legs grew long enough to fit in the stirrups that I stopped needing constant supervision to retrieve my lost boots.

Conversely, Sundays were good except for the itchy suit my mother made me wear to church. The open range with my boots, my

grandpa, my dad, and the rest of the crew was all I wanted.

As time has marched on, my affinity for cowboy boots hasn't changed. But I've also come to understand that dress clothes—even a suit—have a vital place in a farmer's life. Representing agriculture at the highest levels is not just an option; it's a responsibility that sometimes requires standing shoulder to shoulder with politicians, lawyers, and business leaders.

The farmers and ranchers of Farm Bureau

See **MILLER**, page 7

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**COVER: A University of Idaho report shows that 2025 was a tough year financially for a lot of farmers. See story on page 4.** Photo by Jessica Henderson

# The Financial Condition of Idaho Agriculture: 2025

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE – According to an annual report by University of Idaho economists, the financial condition of Idaho agriculture is mixed, but mostly not good.

The university's "Financial Condition of Idaho Agriculture: 2025" report was released to lawmakers Jan. 14. It estimates that Idaho farmers and ranchers brought in a record \$12.1 billion in farm-gate receipts in 2025.

If realized – the report's farm-gate receipt estimates are normally pretty accurate – that would represent a 2 percent increase over 2024.

However, that number, in itself, doesn't tell the real story of what is happening in farm country.

While revenue from the state's livestock sector is forecast to be up in 2025, it's a different story for the crop sector, which has been experiencing low farm-gate prices that are, in many cases, below what it costs the farmer to produce the commodity.

"Yes, we're forecasting a new all-time high number for cash receipts, but that does not mean we are expecting increased tax revenues from the agricultural sector," said U of I agricultural economist Brett Wilder, one of the report's authors. "There are likely going to be some negative net incomes across the crop sector."

The report estimates total farm-gate revenue from Idaho's livestock sector at \$8.2 billion in 2025, which is a 9 percent increase compared with 2024. It forecasts crop revenue at \$3.9 billion, which is a 9 percent decrease from 2024.

"The top-line (\$12.1 billion) number looks really strong, but there is a lot of weakness across the ag sector and there should be some weakness across especially the crop side of the ag sector for a few years to come," Wilder said.

The report was co-authored by agricul-

*"While Idaho's agriculture industry appears strong in aggregate, nearly all revenue gains for the past two years can be attributed to the livestock sector."*

– U of I report

tural economist Xiaoxue "Rita" Du.

It estimates negative total farm-gate revenue in 2025 from virtually all of Idaho's main crops. It shows potato receipts down 12 percent, revenue from sugar beets down 17 percent, barley down 6 percent and wheat down 5 percent.

Hay is the only major crop in Idaho estimated to have more revenue (up 2 percent) in 2025 than 2024. However, the forecast hay receipt total of \$387 million is 29 percent below the previous five-year average and 48 percent lower than the all-time high of \$750 million set in 2022.

During a presentation to dry bean growers Jan. 29, U of I agricultural economist Pat Hatzenbuehler said it's a tough time right now for all crop farmers.

"It's not just dry beans," he said. "All of the other major crops are experiencing outlooks that are pretty bearish. It is just a tough, challenging environment for crop farmers in the United States."

The livestock sector is another story.



Photos by Karen Lustig

**Idaho's livestock sector fared significantly better than the state's crop sector in 2025.**

With farm-level beef prices at record highs, the report estimates the state's cattle and calves sector brought in a record \$3.9 billion in farm-gate revenue in 2025.

That's an 18 percent increase over 2024 and it makes cattle and calves, by a smidgen, the state's new top ag commodity in terms of total farm-gate revenue. That's a



spot milk had held for more than 20 years.

Milk revenue in 2025 was estimated at \$3.888 billion, up very slightly but essentially unchanged from 2024.

Farm-gate milk prices in Idaho were 7 percent lower in 2025, but that sector benefitted from high beef prices, since all milk cows are eventually processed. Idaho dairies also produced more milk last year, which helped keep total revenue the same.

“Despite lower milk prices, a 7 percent increase in year-over-year milk production allowed milk revenues to see a marginal increase ... in 2025,” the report states.

The report also expects milk to regain its No. 1 spot soon.

“Revenues from milk production are expected to reclaim their place as the highest of all agricultural commodities produced in Idaho in 2026 or 2027,” it states.

The report does estimate that net farm income in Idaho increased 6 percent in 2025, to \$2.75 billion. But, again, most of that increase is because of the relative health of the livestock industry.

The projected 6 percent increase in net farm income is 1 percent below the previous five-year average.

The report estimates total Idaho farm revenue in 2025 at \$13.2 billion. This includes farm-gate revenue and other things such as government payments, farm-related income, home consumption and inventory adjustments.

Total expenses are estimated at a record \$10.4 billion, a 3 percent increase over 2024. This includes manufactured inputs, farm-origin inputs, contract labor, property taxes and fees, capital consumption and payments to stakeholders.

Total federal government payments to Idaho farmers are estimated at \$100 million in 2025, up 4 percent compared with 2024, which marked the lowest point since 2015. That \$100 million total means less than 1 percent of Idaho’s total farm revenue in 2025 came from government payments.

According to the report, Idaho’s livestock sector is forecast to account for 68 percent of total farm-gate receipts in 2025. This sector includes cattle and calves and other livestock such as trout, sheep and chicken eggs.

“Idaho agriculture is driven largely by livestock,” the report states. “Except for 2009 – a year of disastrously poor milk prices – livestock cash receipts have surpassed crop cash receipts for every year since 2001.”

“While Idaho’s agriculture industry appears strong in aggregate, nearly all revenue gains for the past two years can be attributed to the livestock sector,” the report states. “A majority of crop producers are expected to be worse off than a year ago.” ■



**Idaho crop farmers faced a tough year financially in 2025, as production costs remained near record levels while crop prices declined.**

*Continued from page 2*

reviewing the text of the bill, but this progress is welcome, and it shows momentum is real.

Farmers and ranchers have been waiting far too long for the certainty that only a new, modernized farm bill can provide. While the One Big Beautiful Bill Act included an essential and meaningful investment in the farm safety net, we still need a comprehensive farm bill that modernizes important farm programs.

Critical policy updates in conservation, credit, research, rural development and other farm bill titles are still on the line, and delays only add more uncertainty at a time when agriculture can least afford it.

Since the last farm bill was passed in 2018, agriculture has weathered a pandemic, runaway inflation, rising interest rates and historic supply chain and market disruptions.

At the same time, farmers are expected to produce more, adapt faster and manage more risk than ever before. Progress on the farm bill is encouraging, but progress only matters if it leads to passage. Congress must finish the job.

### **Progress on trade**

We're also seeing positive movement on trade, and that's good news for farmers, who depend on reliable export markets. The administration recently concluded trade agreements with Argentina, El Salvador, Guatemala and Taiwan, along with announcing a new framework deal with India.

These developments help expand market access, reduce barriers and create more certainty for U.S. agricultural exports. Just as important as reaching these agreements is making sure they are enforced, so farmers and ranchers see the full benefits of trade commitments.

Momentum on trade was also evident recently during a Senate Finance Committee hearing on the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement. Senators highlighted how critical USMCA is to North American agriculture, supply chains and export growth.

The hearing also covered the need to address unfinished busi-

ness, including dairy access to Canada, as the agreement heads into its upcoming review process. Strong trade relationships matter, and it's essential they continue to work for America's farmers and ranchers.

### **Progress on year-round E15**

Another encouraging sign is the continued movement toward year-round E15. Congress recently established the E15 Rural Domestic Energy Council to advance legislation to deliver year-round E15.

From the moment the council was announced, Farm Bureau was ready to engage and ensure the farmer perspective was part of the conversation.

Our staff quickly met with the council's co-chairs to ensure agriculture has a seat at the table as solutions are developed. To help inform the council's work, Farm Bureau also joined a broad coalition of E15 stakeholders on a letter outlining potential paths forward.

For farmers, timing matters. Year-round E15 would strengthen domestic demand for American-grown crops, expand consumer choice, and support energy security.

Momentum on E15 is encouraging, and it's crucial we keep moving forward and get this done.

### **Turning progress into results**

Taken together, these developments show that engagement works. When farmers speak up and stay involved, it leads to real results. Now is the time for lawmakers to hear directly from the people most affected by these decisions.

I encourage farmers, ranchers and everyone who cares about the future of agriculture to stay engaged and make their voices heard.

We're seeing agriculture climb priority lists in Washington. Let's keep that momentum going and make sure progress turns into lasting solutions that strengthen American agriculture for years to come. ■

*Continued from page 2*

So when I say cattle is the lone bright spot in ag right now, what I'm actually saying is that cattle producers are not suffering quite as much as crop farmers.

For every other sector of the agricultural industry, it was a difficult year financially, as farmers continue to receive less for their commodity at the farm gate, while their overall production expenses, particularly

their capital expenses, remain at record levels.

Farm-level crop prices have been declining for several years now and in some cases they have dropped dramatically. Again, production costs have not followed suit.

The loss of some of our export markets has hit commodity producers hard and is one of the reasons prices have dropped. When you have fewer buyers for your product, the price drops.

The U of I report shows total farm-gate receipts from Idaho sugar beet farmers were down a whopping 17 percent last year, compared with the previous year.

The percentage drops in revenue reflected in the report only begin to tell the story of how much pain farmers are feeling right now.

On the one hand, they show what farmers got back to help pay their input costs, like seed and fertilizer.

They don't show the devastation to farmers' capital accounts, which reflect the equity positions of our producers. Equity is what banks and farmers need to keep the ag industry going.

For the non-farmers reading this, can you imagine bringing home 17 percent less in your paycheck while having the same expenses?

While revenue from crop cash receipts continues to fall, the recent U of I report shows total farm and ranch production expenses in Idaho reached a record \$10.4 billion last year.

Remember, this type of information only shows input costs increasing slightly. What it doesn't show is that farmers' capital expenditures have gone up close to 300 percent over the past seven to eight years due to inflation of the dollar.

Yes, it really is that tough in farm country right now and another recent report from USDA doesn't provide a lot of hope for 2026.

That report forecasts U.S. farm income for 2026 and it looks a lot like the U of I estimate for what 2025 looked like: reve-

nue from cattle and calves is expected to increase, while crop revenue is forecast to decline a little when adjusted for inflation.

The USDA report projects that total production expenses will remain at record levels.

Costs for labor, livestock purchases, interest, property taxes and fees, and net rent are all expected to rise, while costs for feed, fertilizer, seed, pesticides and fuel and oil could see slight declines.

The USDA report also revised 2025 production expenses higher.

"Together, these revisions suggest the farm economy is experiencing a generational downturn rather than a temporary slowdown," American Farm Bureau Federation ag economists wrote in a recent Market Intel report. "Outside of the cattle sector, most [agricultural] commodity markets are weakening."

"Against that backdrop, USDA's first look at 2026 points to continued pressure in the farm economy," the AFBF report adds.

That's the bad news and there's no sugar-coating it.

The things that producers are having

to do now to stay in production agriculture, such as debt restructuring, will take decades to repay. The money that was lost in agriculture over the past two years will take more than 30 years to pay back.

The good news is that U.S. and Idaho farmers will continue to produce an ample supply of high-quality food and fiber in 2026. However, that good news for people who like to eat will come at farmers' financial peril.

Farmers don't quit when times get tough. They buckle down, plow ahead and work their way through challenges. Farmers have invested in their operations for generations and don't want to be the ones to lose it.

Here's hoping for a bountiful harvest in 2026 and – one can hope, right? – a positive turn in the market.

But farmers need more than just hope. They need a plan to execute and Farm Bureau will continue to work with our elected officials and others to try to find a way out of this terrible financial situation agriculture finds itself in right now. ■

## MILLER

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*Continued from page 2*

are far more at home in their boots and work clothes, their uniform of infinite variability. For a successful operation, this work attire is worn 85-95% of the time. But there must also be time for every farmer and rancher to wear the suit and polished boots.

One of my favorite events on the Farm Bureau calendar is the annual legislative conference, where members from across the state come to Boise to interact with their representatives. Walking the Capitol halls during those days, it's easy to tell who is a professional farmer versus an experienced politician.

But here's what strikes me: a well-dressed farmer or rancher in a tailored suit can be every bit as dapper as any attorney or elected official. The difference isn't in how they wear the suit—it's in what they bring to it.

You can change a farmer's clothes, but you can't change a farmer; that's the remarkable truth about those who work the land. When a farmer or rancher stands in a suit and boots to speak about agriculture, something powerful happens. Their honesty cuts through political rhetoric.

Their integrity makes others straighten in their chairs and lean forward. Their logic, born from years of managing weather, markets, and unpredictable realities, commands respect that no

amount of polished talking points can manufacture.

The best thing we have at Farm Bureau is our people. As exceptional as our professional team is, no message carries the same weight as a farmer or rancher standing in their suit and boots before decision-makers. No speech or report can match their experience.

Their wisdom carries an authority that others instinctively respect. When agriculture is represented in our capitals, the message is never more compelling than when it comes from those who live it every day.

Ninety-five percent of the year, thank you for wearing your uniform of choice and feeding us through the work of farming and ranching. For the 5% of the year that you don the suit to represent agriculture before our leaders, there is no substitute for your value. This is not a burden; it is a vital part of being a farmer or rancher.

Just as no two farm days are identical, agriculture cannot succeed unless you occasionally don the suits with your boots. No one else can tell your story better or bring your hard-earned wisdom. Stay true to who you are—just with fancier clothes on occasion—and watch as others stand straight to hear what you have to say. ■

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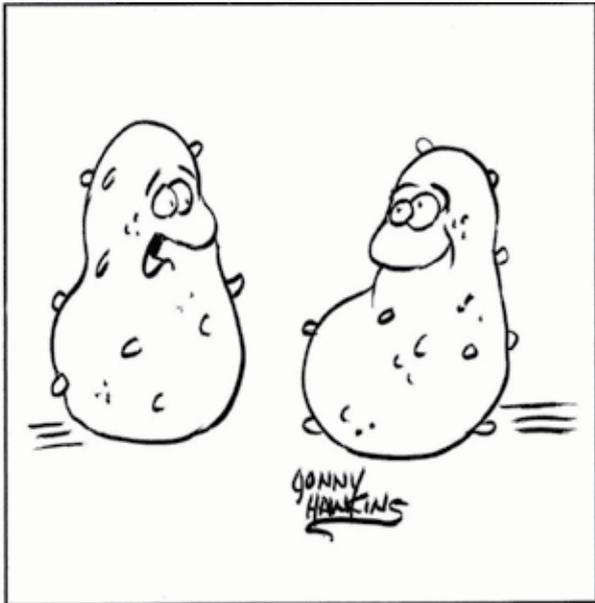


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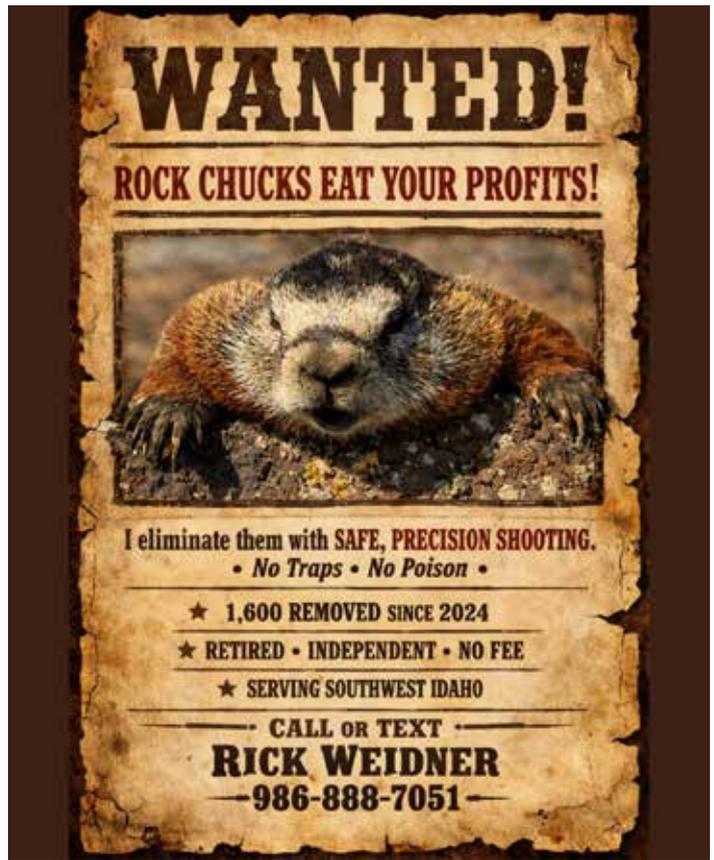


# Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins



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# Farm Bureau members meet with legislators at annual event

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE – At the heart of Idaho Farm Bureau Federation’s annual Legislative Conference is a casual dinner event where farmers and ranchers are able to break bread with legislators from their districts and discuss important issues.

There is no agenda for the dinner; it’s simply a way for Farm Bureau members to mingle with state lawmakers in a non-formal way.

More than half of Idaho’s 105 legislators

*“It’s very important that we get to hear from them as legislators. We hear from lobbyists all the time, but people that are back home on their farms – irrigating, running cows – they’re the experts on what they do and what they say carries a lot of weight with us.”*

– Sen. Mark Harris, R-Soda Springs



Idaho Farm Bureau Federation photos

**Idaho Farm Bureau Federation leaders, left, great legislators and Farm Bureau members Feb. 10 as they show up for a non-formal dinner event.**

showed up for the dinner this year. For some, it’s a must-attend affair.

“I’m partial to this event. I always come to this event,” said Sen. Mark Harris, R-Soda Springs.

Harris, a former IFBF board member, said he enjoys catching up with old friends and hearing about the issues that affect them.

“It’s very important that we get to hear from them as legislators,” he said. “We hear from lobbyists all the time, but people that are back home on their farms – irrigating, running cows – they’re the experts on what they do and what they say carries a lot of weight with us.”

On the other side, it’s a great opportunity for Farm Bureau members to get to know their legislators better and make sure they understand how certain issues and proposed ideas would affect real ranchers and farmers, said IFBF board member Tristan Winegar, who farms in Weiser.

“This conference is near and dear to my heart. It’s the one that I never miss. I’m always here,” he said. “It’s important just to bump elbows with our lawmakers. They

represent us and they want to be around us and we want to be around them, so a dinner like this is a great opportunity to do that.”

Winegar said he always encourages other Farm Bureau members to attend the event because it’s important to become comfortable engaging with policy makers.

“That’s where the rubber meets the road as far as Farm Bureau goes. The whole point of Farm Bureau is to come up with policy, to protect agriculture and to promote freedom,” he said. “The way to do that is through our legislature.”

Russ Hendricks, IFBF’s vice president of governmental affairs, said lawmakers appreciate hearing how various proposals would affect farm and ranch operations.

“Our members are the real experts on how proposals will affect their farming and ranching operations,” he said. “It is always great to see our members engaging with their legislators.”

Hendricks said the main purpose of the conference is “to help Farm Bureau members better understand the legislative process so they know how they can engage to make sure their voices are heard.”

“You are exactly the right people to speak with your legislators,” IFBF President and Canyon County farmer Matt Dorsey told Legislative Conference participants before the dinner was held. “The main point of the dinner is for you as producers to be able to sit down with your legislators and give them your perspectives. We really need your support in doing that with legislators.”

The next day after the dinner event, Dorsey thanked members for doing just that.

“The challenge was given yesterday at lunch and you guys accepted that challenge and had a great Legislative Dinner last night,” he said. “That was because of you guys calling and getting ahold of your representatives and getting them out here. We appreciate your help with that....”

IFBF President and CEO Zak Miller said legislators need and want to know what’s going on back home in their districts.

“Our members – real farmers and ranchers – are able to speak about their personal stories and struggles they are going through and how certain laws are impacting them,” he said. “This helps legislators be better informed and make smart decisions that don’t harm agriculture.”

The two-day Legislative Conference, which was held Feb. 10-11 this year, brings Farm Bureau members from across the

state to Boise to provide them a close-up experience of the state’s legislative process.

They attend committee meetings of the Idaho Legislature and hear from and ask questions of lawmakers. They also hear from the state’s four-member congressional delegation during video calls.

During the conference, members of IFBF’s various advisory committees meet to discuss the latest issues affecting agriculture and float possible solutions.

Members were also able to attend various break-out sessions, where they were briefed on important issues facing Idaho farmers and ranchers.

The video calls by Idaho’s congressional delegation focused heavily on immigration and agriculture’s need for a reliable, legal workforce.

“Every farmer and rancher I talk to, the biggest issue they face is having a legal workforce,” said Rep. Mike Simpson. He said getting that done is his No. 1 priority.

“Across the agricultural community, ag labor is important,” said Sen. Jim Risch. “It’s extremely high on my agenda.”

Rep. Russ Fulcher told Farm Bureau members, “You guys are a great resource for my office; we need you guys. Keep that counsel coming in,” while Sen. Mike Crapo said, “Agriculture is the cornerstone of Idaho’s economy” and added, “Thank you

for everything you do to feed our nation and the world.”

The Legislative Conference was also attended by representatives of other farm and ranch organizations, as well as state agencies that deal with the ag industry. Idaho State Department of Agriculture Director Chanel Tewalt led one of the break-out sessions, as did Idaho Department of Water Resources Director Mat Weaver.

Farm Bureau members also attended legislative committee meetings at the Capitol building and were addressed by lawmakers, including Speaker of the House Mike Moyle.

Moyle, a farmer and rancher, spoke about a fuel tax proposal in the Utah Legislature that would result in Idahoans paying a lot more for fuel.

“It’s a bad deal for everybody in this room,” he said about the proposal, which he believes is an attempt at leverage by Utah to try to get some of Idaho’s water.

He said water and the fuel tax idea are separate issues.

“Our water’s worth more than their oil,” Moyle said. “There’s no deal to be made. We’ll figure out a pathway that’s best for Idaho.”

Legislative Conference participants were also briefed by Rep. Jerald Raymond and Sen. Tammy Nichols, who chair the Senate and House agricultural affairs committees.

A high school speech contest and Discussion Meet were also held during the conference. Winners of both contests won \$1,500.

The Discussion Meet, which was won by Mac Holmes of Meridian, helps young producers hone their public speaking and problem-solving skills during a competition that is meant to simulate a committee meeting rather than a debate.

In the speech contest, participants spend several minutes speaking about a certain agriculture-related topic, without notes, and then answer questions from the judges about the issue. That contest was won by Arabella Kohtz of Twin Falls. ■



**LEFT: Idaho Farm Bureau Federation members hear from members of the state’s congressional delegation during IFBF’s annual Legislative Conference, which was held Feb. 10-11 in Boise.**

# U.S. cattle herd down 300,000 head from 2025

By Bernt Nelson

American Farm Bureau Federation Economist

2025 was a remarkable year for cattle with prices setting records on several occasions.

USDA's most recent net farm income forecast adjusted net farm income downward for 2025 and is projecting lower incomes again in 2026. One of the few bright spots in the agricultural economy has been beef cattle, with cash receipts for cattle rising 39% from 2020 through USDA's forecast for 2026.

## The cattle inventory

USDA's January Cattle Inventory report provides state-level and national data on the number and value of cattle and calves, the number of operations, and detailed breakdowns by class. This report sets the tone and direction for cattle markets for the upcoming year.

The Jan. 30 report was bullish. All cattle and calves on feed in the United States on Jan. 1 totaled 86.2 million head, a 75-year low, down about 300,000 head, or 0.3%, from 86.5 million head in 2025.

While this is a much smaller decline than the 1.6% average inventory decline from the last five years, it is still an indicator that the U.S. cattle supply is continuing to fall. The continued decline in cattle, though small, means we are now in year 13 of the current cattle cycle and year eight of contraction.

Other data contained in the report provides clues about when expansion could begin.

## Beef cows and calf crop decline

Beef cows that have calved totaled 27.6 million, down 285,000 head, or 1%, from 27.9 million in 2025 and the lowest since 1961. Heifers for beef cow replacement were 4.71 million, up 1% from 4.67 million in 2025.

Heifers for beef cow replacement expected to calve were 2.96 million, also up 1% from 2025. This increase in replacement heifers means that farmers are beginning to keep some heifers for breeding rather than placing them on feed for beef production. This does not necessarily mean the cattle herd is about to expand, but it is one of the first steps of expansion.

The 2025 calf crop is estimated at 32.9 million head, down about 521,000 head, or 2%, from 2024. This is a record low and is the second consecutive year a record low has been set.

For any expansion in the cattle inventory to occur, the calves from this year's calf crop, particularly heifers, will have to be kept for breeding rather than placed on feed for beef production.

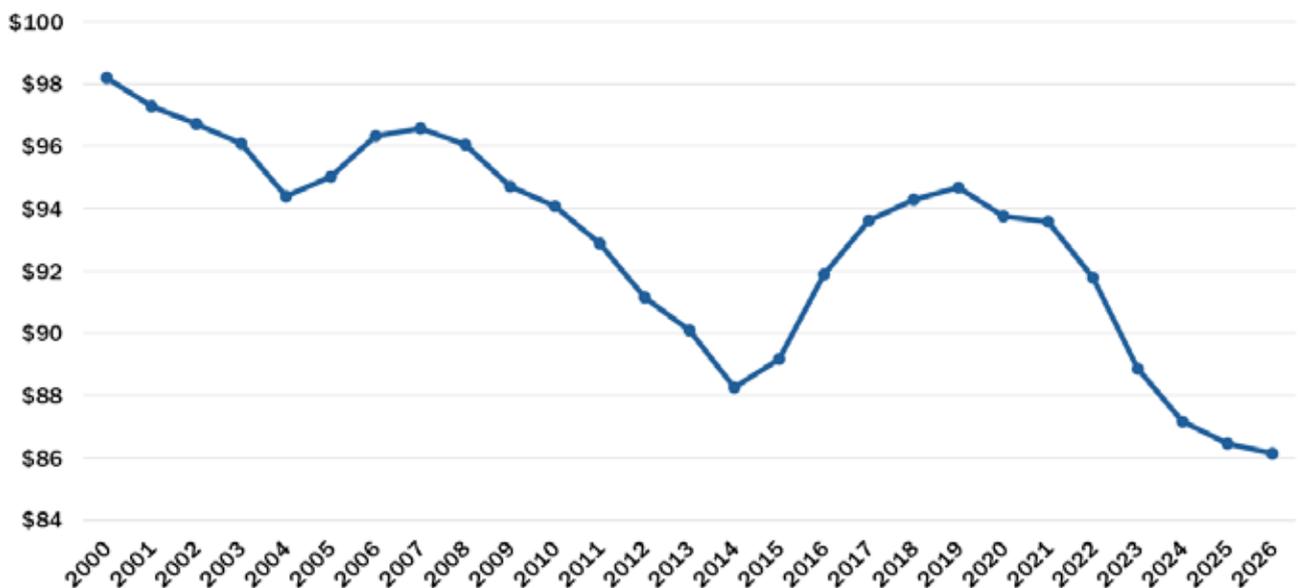
If this happens, these calves could produce a calf of their own in 2027 and present the possibility of some herd expansion by 2028. However, the lower number of beef cows combined with the smaller calf crop means a smaller calf crop can be expected in 2027.

A smaller 2025 calf crop also means there are fewer cattle available to be placed on feed in 2026. The U.S. border to Mexico remains closed to imported livestock, including beef cattle, to combat the spread of New World screwworm.

Approximately 1.2 million-1.5 million head of cattle placed into

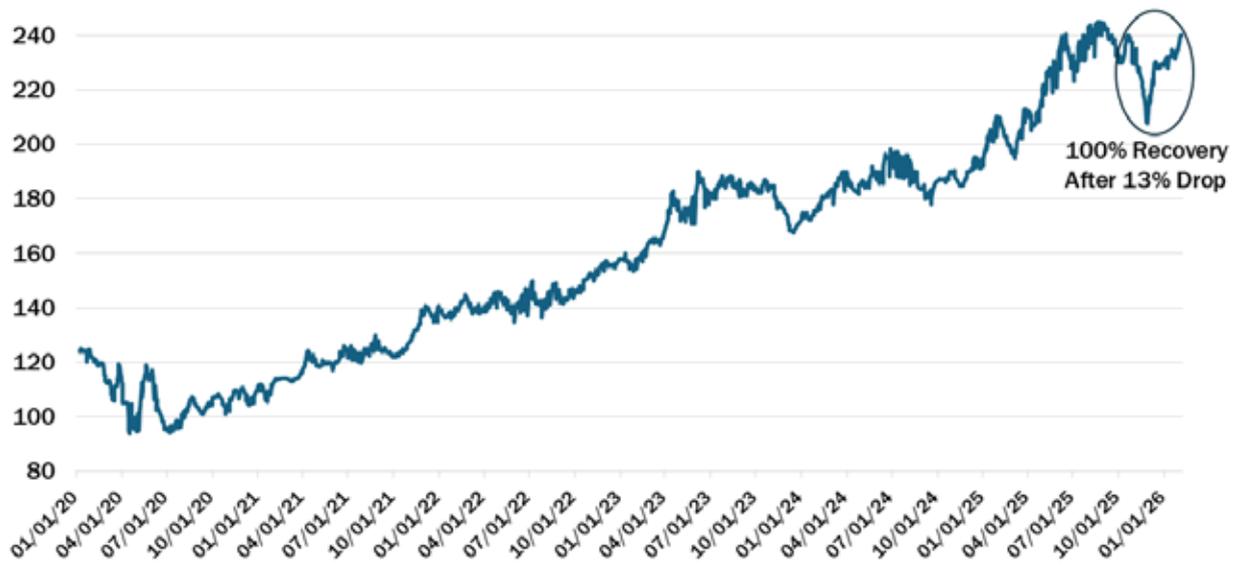
## Cattle Inventory Enters 8<sup>th</sup> Year of Contraction

Historic Cattle Inventory, Total Head, Jan. Report 2000-2026



# Cattle Prices Recovering After 13% Drop in One Month

Dollars Per Hundredweight | Daily | Jan. 2020 - Feb. 2026



 American Farm Bureau Federation

Sources: USDA AMS, Analysis By American Farm Bureau Federation

feedlots for beef production are imported to the U.S. from Mexico when the border is open each year. This supply constraint will keep prices for feeder cattle elevated in 2026 and 2027.

## Beef production

Even though cattle numbers are continuing to fall, USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) increased its beef production forecast toward the end of 2025 (still below 2024 levels). However, lower beef production is expected in 2026. This is because the average live weight of fed cattle was a record high for every quarter in 2025.

The average live weight of all fed cattle for quarter four in 2025 was 1,460 pounds, 50 pounds, or 3.5%, higher than the five-year average live weight of 1,410 pounds.

USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service's (NASS) Cattle on Feed report indicated marketings of fed cattle well below year-ago levels in every month in 2025 since April. However, the increase in live weights has been enough to offset much of the decline in marketings and keep production estimates for 2025 at 25.95 billion pounds, just 3.8% below 2024.

Based on the trend of higher weights and lower marketings, USDA's latest World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE) report estimates beef production in 2026 will be 25.735 billion pounds, less than 1% lower than 2025.

## The markets

Cattle markets set several records in 2025, along with experiencing tremendous volatility. Most notable, the 5-market monthly weighted average negotiated price for fed steers hit a record \$243/cwt in August.

Higher cattle prices are due to historically tight cattle supplies, but also consistently strong consumer demand for beef. The most

recent data from USDA's ERS estimates the composite all-fresh retail price of beef was a record \$9.55 per pound in December after posting a new record high in every month since June.

Demand for beef has remained strong even while these prices have continued to climb.

## Imports and Argentina

Tighter supplies of cattle have led to tremendous volatility in the cattle and beef markets. When supplies of commodities are low, they become more sensitive to news or changes that can impact supply or demand, and the result is market volatility. One example of high volatility is the October 22 announcement to increase the tariff rate quote (TRQ) on beef from Argentina.

An additional expected market response to lower cattle supplies for beef is increased imports. As the cattle inventory continues to decline, beef imports climb. According to data from USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service, beef imports increased by 258,490 metric tons, or 17%, from 1.5 million metric tons from January through November 2024 to 1.76 million metric tons for the same period in 2025.

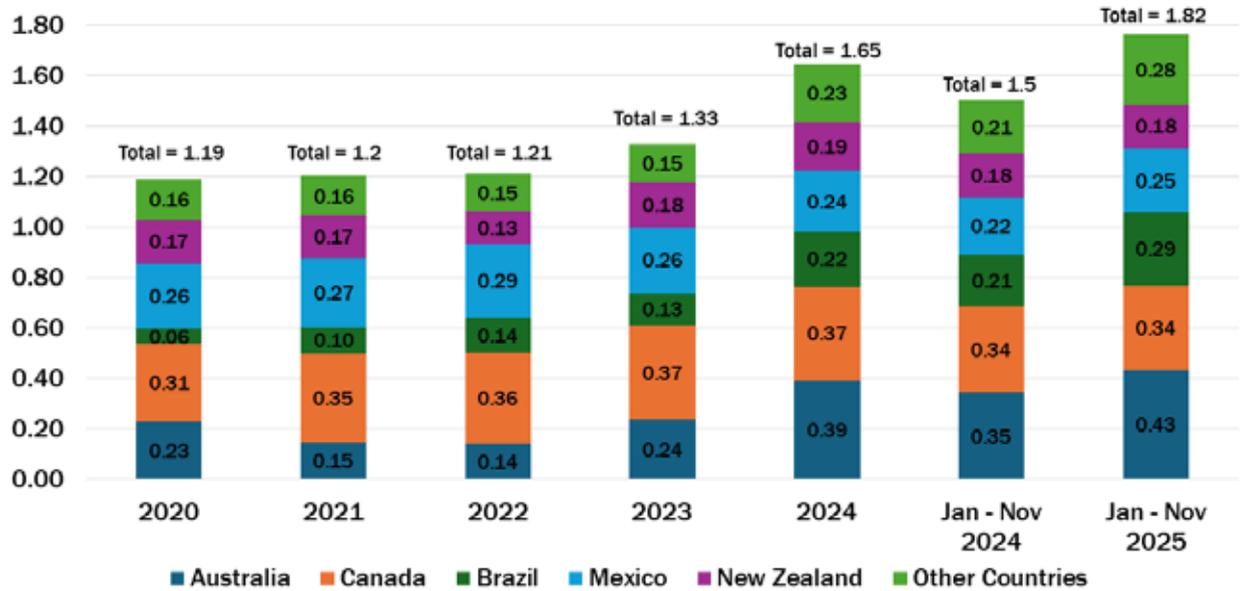
Put another way, the U.S. cattle inventory has declined by 7.7% from 2020 to 2025 while beef imports during the same time period have increased by about 48% by volume. Australia was the number one source of imported beef in 2025 with 434,578.8 metric tons of beef, up 25% from 2024 and 88% from 2020.

Since 2020, approximately 2% of U.S. beef and veal imports originated from Argentina. Argentina has a tariff rate quota into the U.S. of 20,000 metric tons per year with exports above this volume tariffed at 26.4%. Beef coming into the U.S. from Argentina is grass-fed beef and is used as lean trimmings for ground beef.

The October announcement proposed to increase the TRQ

# U.S. Beef Imports Up 17% From 2024

Annual Top Exporters of Beef to U.S., Million Metric Tons, 2020-2025



**AFB** American Farm Bureau Federation

Sources: USDA FAS, Analysis By American Farm Bureau Federation

from 20,000 metric tons per year to 80,000 metric tons per year. Industry experts do not believe increased imports from Argentina will have a measurable impact on prices paid by consumers for beef.

However, the market response following the October announcement was substantial. Following the announcement, the 5-market average cash cattle price fell 13%, from \$239/cwt before hitting its low price of \$207 on Nov. 28. In addition, feeder cattle and live cattle futures experienced several limit down (the maximum range for a futures contract in a single trading session) trading sessions following the announcement.

Since that time, cash cattle prices have recovered.

On Feb. 5, the United States Trade Representative (USTR) signed the United States–Argentina Agreement on Reciprocal Trade and Investment (ARTI). The agreement improves some sanitary and phytosanitary barriers that limit beef and pork exports to Argentina.

It also allows temporary duty-free importation of U.S. beef into Argentina by removing the 9% duty for beef imported up to the 20,000 metric ton TRQ and an additional 20,000 metric tons per quarter for a total of 100,000 metric tons for 2026 only.

On Feb. 6, the White House released a Presidential Proclamation allowing additional temporary access of Argentine beef into the U.S., increasing the TRQ by 80,000 tons of lean trimmings.

This means Argentina will be able to export an additional 20,000 metric tons of beef per quarter at a tariff rate of 4.4 cents per kilogram of beef for Argentina’s World Trade Organization TRQ of 20,000 metric tons and for their additional 20,000 metric

tons per quarter for a total of 100,000 metric tons to the U.S. in 2026 only.

Any additional exports are subject to the 26.4% tariff rate. This 100,000 metric tons would account for approximately 5% of U.S. beef imports or about 1% of total U.S. consumption. The market response has been calm compared to the first announcement. Futures markets edged gently higher on Feb. 9 following the ARTI and Presidential Proclamation.

## Conclusions

USDA’s Jan. 1 Cattle Inventory report confirms the U.S. cattle herd remains in the contraction phase of the cattle cycle with little opportunity for meaningful expansion until at least 2028. Declines in beef cows and the calf crop underscore just how tight supplies have become, even while modest increases in replacement heifers suggest farmers and ranchers are cautiously considering rebuilding.

In the short run, fewer calves, limited feeder cattle availability, and restricted live cattle imports will continue to constrain cattle markets.

These fundamentals have translated into historically high prices and pronounced volatility across both cattle and beef markets. Strong consumer demand has allowed higher prices to persist, offsetting broader weakness in the agricultural economy and making beef cattle one of the few bright spots in agriculture.

Looking ahead, cattle producers still face substantial uncertainty that clouds herd rebuilding decisions. Ongoing animal health threats, including New World screwworm, along with the potential for another severe drought year, continue to raise costs and production risk despite strong underlying demand. ■

# Idaho sets a record for ag export value

By Sean Ellis

*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

Idaho set a record for total value of agricultural exports in 2024, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Idaho companies sold \$2.84 billion worth of agricultural products to other nations in 2024, up 8 percent from \$2.64 billion in 2023 and 1.4 percent more than the previous record of \$2.8 billion set in 2022.

A separate set of data by the U.S. Census Bureau shows Idaho was on track for another record ag export year in 2025.

According to the Census Bureau data, \$1.2 billion worth of agricultural products were exported from Idaho through October 2025. The current annual record according to that set of data is \$1.36 billion, set in 2024.

The Census Bureau data is based on what state a commodity is exported from, so it doesn't capture all of Idaho farm product exports. For example, it wouldn't capture the wheat from Idaho that is exported out of Portland.

The USDA data, which is typically released in the fall for the previous year, captures more of the state's farm exports but is not as timely as the Census Bureau data, which is released monthly.

However, both sets of data track closely when it comes to percentage increases and decreases.

According to the Census Bureau data, Idaho set records for total ag export value in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 and was on pace through October 2025 for potentially another record.

The USDA data shows the export values of livestock products from Idaho in 2024 saw a notable increase compared to 2023,



Photo by Sean Ellis

**Dry beans are harvested in a field near Hazelton in 2024.**

said Doug Robison, the Idaho president for AgWest Farm Credit.

"This growth outpaced that of plant products," he noted.

However, both categories fared well in 2024.

USDA put the total value of animal product exports from Idaho at \$1.07 billion in 2024, a 10 percent increase from 2023.

The total value of plant product exports from Idaho was put at \$1.77 billion in 2024, a 6 percent increase.

"Beef exports led the way for livestock, achieving an impressive 20.5 percent gain for the year," Robison noted. "This surge was primarily driven by higher export volumes..."

Plant export volumes showed variability, he said, "but were strongly supported by the growth in the fresh and processed vegetable categories representing potatoes."

The total value of processed vegetable exports from Idaho was \$367 million in 2024, up 5 percent, while fresh vegetable export value was \$188 million, also up 5 percent from 2023.

Both these categories are heavy on potato products.

The total value of wheat exports from Idaho reached \$310 million in 2024, up slightly from \$307 million in 2023.

Total value of exports under the "feeds and other feed grains" category were set at \$129 million, down 15 percent from \$152 million in 2023.

Corn export value dropped from \$25 million to \$29 million while pork exports jumped from \$6 million to \$21 million.

The total value of processed grain product exports fell from \$83 million to \$81 million.

The USDA data shows a steady increase in Idaho farm product exports over the past decade, from \$1.84 billion in 2015 to \$2.84 billion in 2024.

During that same period, plant product exports have gone from \$1.2 billion to \$1.77 billion, while animal product exports have gone from \$633 million to \$1.07 billion.

Idaho's 2025 farm export numbers are expected to be released by USDA this fall. ■

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Photos by Sean Ellis

Idaho State Department of Agriculture Director Chanel Tewalt addresses Idaho FFA students Jan. 26 during the organization's annual Cenarrusa "Day on the Hill" event.

# FFA blue jackets flood Boise

By Sean Ellis

*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

BOISE – Every winter, hundreds of Idaho FFA students from around the state descend on Boise during the state's legislative session.

Hard to miss because they're wearing their iconic blue jackets, they mingle with lawmakers and ag industry leaders and get to learn about and experience the legislative process in person.

Lawmakers also benefit from this event, said Rep. Shawn Dygert, who taught ag education for 35 years.

"It's a really good two-way learning experience," he said Jan. 26 during this year's "Cenarrusa Day on the Hill" luncheon, which kicks off the two-day FFA event. "Lawmakers get to learn how awesome these kids are and how they already understand the is-

sues ... especially agricultural issues. It shows them the return on investment the state gets for investing in agricultural education."

Dygert was one of dozens of lawmakers who showed up for the Day on the Hill luncheon.

"I look forward to this event every year," said Rep. Jerald Raymond, who was in FFA himself as a high school student and is chairman of the House Agricultural Affairs Committee.

Raymond and Dygert said it's not lost on them and others that these FFA students are the future of agriculture.

"These kids are leaders of agriculture in the future, so it's a great opportunity for us to meet them and talk about ag issues," Raymond said.

He added that meeting with FFA students makes him confident in the future of the agricultural industry and the state itself, since many of Idaho's leaders have FFA experience.

*“I left the event with a strong sense of confidence in the future of agriculture, driven by the evident preparedness and unwavering commitment demonstrated by these high school students.”*

*– Andi Woolf-Weibye, Executive Director, Idaho Bean Commission*



**FFA members from around the state meet with lawmakers and ag industry leaders Jan. 26 during the Cenarrusa “Day on the Hill” luncheon.**

“They make me very, very confident,” Raymond said. “They are sharp. They know their issues. They’re hard workers. I’m very confident that our state’s in good hands.”

They’re not just leaders in the future, Dygert said. “A lot of them are already doing leadership stuff in their communities today.”

Raymond said even legislators who don’t know much about agriculture are impressed with FFA students when they meet them.

“Even folks who ... don’t understand the background of what FFA is get really impressed when they see these kids operate,” he said.

Ag industry leaders also benefit from the interaction with FFA students, said Idaho Bean Commission Executive Director Andi Woolf-Weibye.

She said she was impressed with how well prepared and informed on the issues the FFA students were.

“I left the event with a strong sense of confidence in the future of agriculture, driven by the evident preparedness and unwavering commitment demonstrated by these high school students,” she said.

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.

The Day on the Hill 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.

During the luncheon, Idaho State Department of Agriculture Director Chanel Tewalt told FFA members the farming industry will need their talents in order for U.S. agriculture to remain competitive globally.

She provided some examples of the type of challenges the domestic industry is facing. That included the fact that China has increased its potato exports by 10 times in the past four years.

“That is astonishing growth,” said Tewalt, who grew up on a livestock operation and is a former FFA student herself.

She added: “... in the next couple of years, internally China will increase its potato processing capacity by double. It is absolutely positioning itself to out-compete American agriculture. There’s no question about it.”

That type of growth is also happening in India, Tewalt said.

“Americans are going to eat, one way or another,” she said. “Whether or not we eat food produced in America is going to be up to you guys. It’s going to come down to the folks in this room.”

Tewalt told FFA member the ag department’s door is always open to them. “It is our favorite thing to interact with you.”

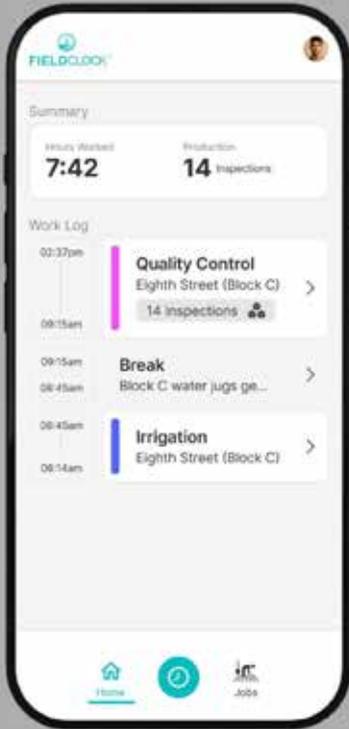
She also encouraged them to keep the department in mind for possible internships. “FFA students are absolutely my favorite folks to host for internships.”

The Northwest Agricultural Cooperative Council, the main sponsor of the luncheon, presented friend of the industry awards to Rep. Steve Miller and Sen. Kelly Anthon.

Honorary FFA degrees for their long-time support of Idaho FFA and agricultural education were presented to Sen. Van Burtenshaw and Rep. John Vander Woude. ■



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# Easy stock water management, year-round

By Paige Nelson

For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

For livestock owners, winter is also known as “ice-chopping season”!

Frosty mornings get even colder when ice has to be broken and removed from the stock tanks before cattle can drink. There’s also the timeless question of “pitchfork or shovel” when throwing hunks of ice out of the trough.

Fourth-generation ranchers Shondah and Randall Otwell, of Oshoto, Wy., were sick of water in its solid state in their stock tanks. They were also tired of relying on costly and inefficient tank heaters. Randall decided to design a more effective tool.

“After several years of design and testing, on a particularly frigid morning in 2022, we discovered that our latest design worked really well,” says Shondah. “At that time, we began the process of getting this revolutionary product patented.”

They named it the Water Rippler and designed it to float at the water’s surface in a tank. It continuously circulates the water and inhibits ice formation in the winter and algae growth in the summer. Additionally, Shondah notes that the constant surface agitation prevents mosquitoes from laying their eggs in the trough.

While the Water Rippler itself is very quiet, the Otwells have observed the sound of gentle rip-



Photos courtesy of Shondah Otwell

**Randall Otwell assembling a new Water Rippler.**

ples in the water is attractive to livestock, as it mimics a natural stream. During warmer seasons, the constant circulation of the water maintains a cooler temperature than stagnant water.

“On a 103-degree day last summer,” says Shondah, “the Water Rippler created a 10-degree difference between a tank with it and without it. Naturally, our livestock preferred the cooler Water Rippler tank for their drink.”

At around 13¢ per day operating cost or 97% less electricity usage than stock tank heaters, the Water Rippler melts away any alternative electric heating options and makes year-round usage attractive.

The design features a 12-volt DC pump packaged with a waterproof 120VAC to 12VDC converter, which allows it to be used with a standard 120-volt AC electrical outlet and makes it

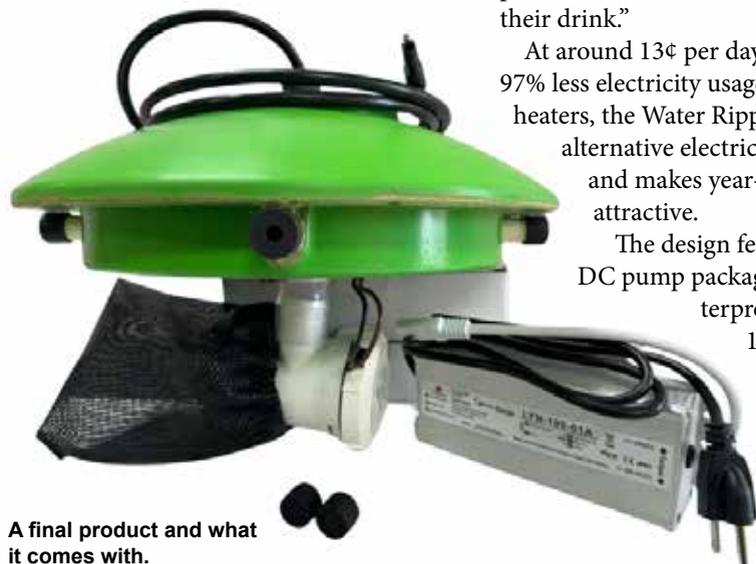
compatible with solar power systems. The Rippler comes with a standard 6-foot-long power cord, but a 10-foot extension can be purchased separately and connects with a standard electrical outlet or a solar-powered battery.

The Water Rippler is customizable to the tank’s size and shape. For a round tank, four high-velocity caps send water out equally in all directions. Solid caps replace the high-velocity caps for a smaller or rectangular tank to prevent overspray.

A required 9-12 inches of water depth keeps the Water Rippler pump out of the debris at the bottom of the tank and ensures proper water circulation.

The current supply is limited as the Otwells are laser-focused on large-scale manufacturing with high-standard quality control parameters in place. Randall and Shondah are taking orders now at [www.water-ripler.com](http://www.water-ripler.com). The Water Rippler is priced at \$349.

Those interested can watch videos of the Water Rippler in action and get installation instructions on the website or visit [www.facebook.com/waterrippler/](http://www.facebook.com/waterrippler/). ■



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Photo by Joel Benson

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation member Jennifer Cook, joined by IFBF President Matt Dorsey, right, presents a framed copy of her winning photo to Gov. Brad Little.

## Winning Farm Bureau photo now hangs in governor's room

By Sean Ellis

*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

BOISE – A copy of a winning photo from Idaho Farm Bureau Federation's annual photo contest now hangs in Gov. Brad Little's office.

The photo was taken by Bingham County farmer and rancher Jennifer Cook.

"It's an honor. It's kind of overwhelming," Cook said Feb. 9 while presenting a framed copy of her winning entry to Little in the Idaho Capitol building. "I didn't realize it would be such a big deal, but it's exciting."

IFBF added a category for its 2025 photo contest called Governor's Choice Award. Cook's photo of mountains near Stanley was the winning entry. It includes a river winding through the valley and cattle grazing.

The photo will hang in the governor's policy room.

"I hope this a good reminder of agriculture in Idaho and how

important it is," Cook said while presenting the photo to the governor. "Hopefully, it will help people keep that on their minds when they're making decisions."

Cook was joined in the photo presentation by a handful of other Idaho Farm Bureau Federation members, including President Matt Dorsey and CEO Zak Miller.

"The saying is still true: a picture is worth a thousand words. And what's more beautiful and more Idahoan than agriculture pictures from Idaho?" Miller said during the presentation.

Miller said he hopes the photo will help remind people in the policy room who they're working for.

The 2025 photo contest had 298 entries submitted by about 80 people.

Cook took the photo in July while she and her husband, Todd, were driving to IFBF's annual Summer Leadership Conference in McCall. She took the picture just north of Stanley.

"We were headed toward lower Stanley and turned around and this is what we saw," she said. ■

# Forest stewardship in dry years

By Randy Brooks  
*University of Idaho*

Much of Idaho has entered 2026 under unusually drier and warmer winter conditions. Snowpack in several basins has measured below long-term averages, and soil moisture levels are lower than what forest managers typically hope to see entering spring.

In forested landscapes, snowpack is more than a seasonal benchmark; it functions as a water reservoir that sustains tree growth well into early summer. When that reserve is limited, trees begin the growing season already operating at a deficit. Physiological drought weakens a tree's natural defenses. Conifers such as ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and lodgepole pine rely on adequate moisture to produce resins (sap) that help repel bark beetles and seal off fungal infections or pitch out attacking bark beetles.

When water is scarce, that defense system is compromised. At the same time, warmer winter temperatures can increase overwinter survival of certain insect populations.

When limited moisture and improved pest survival coincide, forest health risk increases. For Idaho landowners and managers, that means this is a year to pay close attention to our forests. Across the state, bark beetles remain a recurring concern. Annual



Photo by Tom Eckberg, Idaho Department of Lands  
**Pitch tubes on conifers typically indicate bark beetle attack. Drought-stressed trees have a harder time pitching out insects. Reducing competition can help alleviate stress.**

aerial detection surveys conducted by the Idaho Department of Lands consistently document thousands of acres impacted by bark beetles, defoliators, and root diseases.

While outbreak intensity varies, drought often amplifies impacts. Overly dense stands, over-mature timber, and trees growing on marginal or shallow soils are especially vulnerable. Proactive thinning and density management remain among the most effective

**Diplodia tip blight is a fungus that attacks shoot tips. When severe enough, the stress caused to the tree by Diplodia can lead to bark beetle attacks.** Photo by Noah Lindeman, Idaho Dept of Lands



tive long-term tools for reducing susceptibility to both insects and drought stress.

While bark beetles often dominate discussion, fungal diseases are also responsible to current environmental conditions. In northern Idaho, particularly along the Clearwater River corridor near Orofino, landowners have observed increasing symptoms consistent with *Diplodia* tip blight in ponderosa pine.

*Diplodia* tip blight, caused by the fungus *Sphaeropsis sapinea*, infects new shoots and needles, leading to browning, shortened growth, and branch dieback. The disease is frequently associated with stressed trees and tends to intensify during drought conditions.

Along portions of the Clearwater River drainage, affected pines show scattered crown thinning and repeated shoot mortality, particularly in younger stands or trees already under competitive stress.

While *Diplodia* rarely kills large, otherwise healthy trees outright, repeated infection reduces vigor and can predispose trees to secondary insect attack. Over time, cumulative stress may reduce stand resilience and timber quality.

For private landowners in the Clearwater region and beyond, management actions should focus first on improving overall tree health. Reducing stand density lowers competition for limited moisture.

Maintaining appropriate spacing improves airflow and light penetration, both of which can reduce disease severity.

Removing severely infected material where practical may limit localized spread. In landscape or high-value settings, sanitation pruning and carefully timed fungicide treatments may be appropriate, but in most forested settings, improving stand vigor through sound silviculture is the most practical and cost-effective approach.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) provides a structured framework for addressing these concerns. IPM is not a single treatment or product; it is a decision-making process grounded in monitoring, identification, threshold-based response, and evaluation.

In forestry, IPM recognizes that complete eradication of pests is neither realistic nor ecologically desirable. Instead, the goal is to maintain forest health at levels that are economically and environmentally sustainable.

Monitoring is foundational to IPM. Idaho landowners are encouraged to walk their properties regularly, especially during spring and early summer, watching for crown discoloration, pitch tubes, top dieback, or unusual mortality.

Early detection allows for targeted and proportionate response. Extension educators, consulting foresters, and Idaho Department of Lands personnel can assist with diagnosis and recommendations.

Vegetation management also plays a central role in IPM. In regenerating or newly planted stands across Idaho, competing grasses and shrubs can out-compete seedlings for moisture and nutrients, and sometimes sunlight.

Herbicides, when used according to label directions and as part of a broader plan, can significantly improve seedling establishment and survival. However, chemicals used as a tool should complement, not replace, mechanical treatments, proper site preparation, and thoughtful species selection.

Responsible application practices matter. Careful calibration of equipment, attention to wind and weather conditions, protection of riparian areas, and compliance with all label requirements, are non-negotiable components of stewardship.

Idaho's forests support critical watersheds that provide drinking water, irrigation water supply, and aquatic habitat. Protecting those resources must remain central in any pest management decision.

Wildfire risk intersects directly with forest health. Dense stands, heavy ladder fuels, and drought-stressed trees increase the likelihood of high-severity fire. Thinning, pruning, and surface fuel reduction not only reduce fire intensity but also improve tree vigor and resistance to pests.

In the wildland-urban interface, homeowners can further reduce risk by creating defensible space, maintaining roofs and gutters free of needles and debris, and selecting fire-resistive vegetation near structures.

Idaho's forest-based economy depends on long-term productivity and sustainability. Wood products, recreation, grazing, and watershed services all rely on healthy forests.

Years characterized by low snowpack and early drought highlight the importance of proactive management. Waiting for visible decline often means opportunities for effective intervention have already narrowed.

Looking ahead, continued collaboration among landowners, agencies, and Extension professionals will be essential. Sharing observations, reporting unusual pest activity, and participating in educational programs strengthens collective response capacity.

Idaho's forests are diverse, and conditions vary by region, elevation, and ownership, but the principles of monitoring, prevention, and adaptive management apply statewide.

Integrated Pest Management remains one of the most practical and flexible approaches available to landowners. By combining regular observation, sound silviculture, appropriate use of tools, and long-term planning, Idaho forest stewards can navigate challenging conditions and position their forests for resilience.

A dry year demands our attention, but it also presents an opportunity to reaffirm the value of active, informed stewardship.

To find out more about Integrated Pest Management, consider attending one of our Extension Forestry field days. Check here for dates and locations near you: <https://www.uidaho.edu/extension/natural-resources/forestry/programs>. ■

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





Researchers from the University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and the College of Science have teamed up to pioneer the use of computer modeling to develop new classes of fungicides for use in potato production. Pictured are Plant Sciences undergraduate student Brogan Bates and Brenda Schroeder, associate research professor and plant pathologist.

University of Idaho photos

# Pesticide pioneers

U of I team taking novel approach to developing new fungicides for potato growers

By John O'Connell  
*University of Idaho*

A University of Idaho research team is pioneering the use of computer molecular modeling to develop new agricultural fungicides, including some that will attack crop pathogens in novel ways.

The approach is akin to methods used in designing pharmaceuticals for human health — developing fungicides by conducting experiments, running computer simulations and combining chemicals to form new compounds.

The U of I team includes seven scientists from the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALs), the College of Science (SCI) and the College of Engineering, focusing initially on developing fungicides for potato production.

They've identified several compounds proven to be highly effective against major potato fungal diseases and expect their collaboration to yield new fungicides that U of I will license for chemical companies to produce.

"We've had a high success rate. We've screened fewer than 60 compounds and already have 15 that have some action," said Brenda Schroeder, a CALs researcher with the Department of Entomology, Plant Pathology and Nematology. "Looking at the bigger picture, this approach is adaptable to all pathogen groups in some fashion. This could be expanded past the fungi once the system is in place."

## New modes of action

A key strength of the project is the discovery of compounds belonging to entirely new fungicide classes with unique modes of action — targeting specific aspects of fungal biology to inhibit pathogen growth.

There are 17 fungicide groups. Overusing products from a single group without rotating modes of action can lead to chemically resistant fungi.

“When resistance pops up, there are not a whole lot of options out there,” said Marty Ytreberg, a professor of the Department of Physics and director of the Institute for Modeling Collaboration and Innovation.

The researchers are developing compounds that target fungal proteins unused in existing fungicides, seeking to provide growers with new modes of action. Of those screened, Ytreberg anticipates three to five will eventually be commercialized, and two to three new fungicide groups will be introduced to the market.

## Building a protein catalog

The team prioritized targeting fungal proteins distinct from those in plants and animals to avoid unintended impacts on crops, human health or the environment.

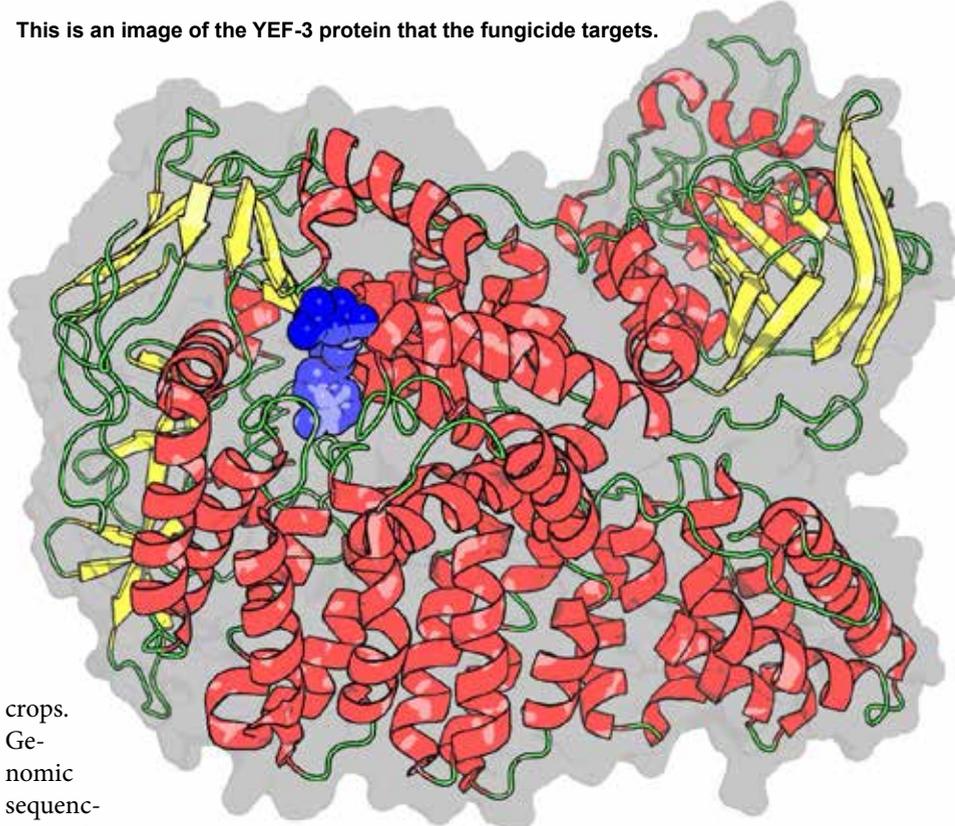
“We’ve really only targeted a minimal number of proteins that we’ve identified in fungi as important,” said Schroeder, whose lab tests the compounds in greenhouse potato production to ensure spud growth isn’t hindered. “We have a large number of proteins that we’ve identified as important that we could potentially target, so this is just building the foundation.”

The team has identified 80 additional compounds that look promising based on modeling and await lab testing.

Once products are proven effective, Ytreberg, Jagdish Patel, with the Department of Chemical and Biological Engineering, and Kristopher Waynant, with the Department of Chemistry, explore chemical modifications to further improve the potential fungicide’s performance. Then, Schroeder and Department of Biological Sciences faculty Klas Udekwu and Paul Rowley evaluate them yet again in trials, and Bernards investigates application techniques.

A major challenge is the lack of complete genomic sequences for most commercial

This is an image of the YEF-3 protein that the fungicide targets.



crops. Genomic sequencing — deciphering an organism’s DNA to reveal genetic information essential for biological functions — is critical for identifying target proteins for pesticide development.

“There are big pieces missing in the agricultural data, and when you move from potatoes to corn to wheat to onions, all of those hosts have very different genomes,” Schroeder said.

## Playing to their strengths

About three years ago, Ytreberg and Rowley began recruiting U of I researchers interested in drug design. After struggling to find funding for the work, they pivoted and played to U of I’s strength in agricultural science as a land-grant university.

“We put two and two together and said, ‘Wait a minute. What are we missing for conducting human research with antifungals? Well, a hospital,’” Rowley said. “Then we came to the realization that we have farm field trials. We have people doing all sorts of great work in agriculture. We have the complete package there.”

They recruited Schroeder for her expertise in fungal pathology and agriculture.

They’ve positioned themselves as trailblazers in crop protectant development. While major agricultural-chemical compa-

nies use computer molecular modeling to refine products, U of I researchers aren’t aware of anyone else applying their strategy to develop compounds.

“This is completely unique in the ag world,” Waynant said. “At least for now, we’re the only ones doing it.”

## Helping potato farmers

The researchers first targeted four major potato diseases: late blight, *Verticillium* wilt, *Fusarium* dry rot and *Pythium* leak.

They launched the project with a one-year, \$100,000 IGEN grant from the state’s Higher Education Research Council and, in fall 2025, secured a two-year, \$120,000 Specialty Crop Block Grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture that is administered by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture.

The team will use SCBG funding to screen compounds against early blight, black dot, silver scurf, *Rhizoctonia*, pink rot and powdery scab — diseases for which growers currently have few control options.

Royalties from licensed products are expected to be substantial, with the team estimating at least \$60,000 annually per fungicide for U of I. ■

# USDA report: 2026 will look like 2025

By Sean Ellis

*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

POCATELLO – Last year was a very challenging year financially for U.S. farmers. According to a recent USDA report, this year, unfortunately, doesn't look to be much different.

USDA's Farm Sector Income Forecast, released Feb. 5, estimates that 2026 will look a lot like 2025 for U.S. agriculture.

The report contained USDA's initial outlook into the financial health of the country's agricultural sector.

It wasn't encouraging for farmers who received much less for their crops than it took to produce them in 2025.

It estimates that total U.S. farm cash receipts – this is the money farmers and ranchers receive for their commodity – will decline by \$14 billion, or 3 percent, compared with 2025.

USDA expects total crop receipts to increase by 1.2 percent, but adjusted for inflation, they are forecast to decline by 0.7 percent.

Most crop farmers in the United States and Idaho have suffered through at least a couple of years of declining commodity prices, while overall production costs have remained near record levels.

The reason for these depressed prices comes down to a classic supply and demand situation, University of Idaho Extension educator Colby Field told farmers during a recent Cereal School in Idaho Falls.

Speaking of wheat, he said, "There is a lot of supply in the United States. That high supply puts downward pressure on prices ... We see a high supply in most commodities."

While talking about depressed bean prices, U of I Extension specialist Pat Hatzenbuehler said basically the same thing, in a different way.

"For beans and other crops, it's a very challenging environment right now," he said.

The USDA report projects farm and ranch production expenses will remain stable in 2026. That's not a good thing, since farm input costs are near record levels.

USDA forecasts that farm sector production expenses will total \$478 billion this year, up 1 percent, or \$4.6 billion, from 2025.

The three largest production expense categories for agriculture



in 2026 are expected to be livestock/poultry purchases, feed, and labor.

Livestock and poultry purchases, the largest single expense category, are forecast to total \$66 billion, up 10 percent compared with 2025.

Feed expenses are forecast to continue a decline that began in 2023 and are expected to fall by 7 percent.

Cash labor expenses are forecast to total \$54 billion, which is a 2 percent increase from 2025.

When total farm expenses are deducted from total revenue, USDA expects net farm income in the U.S. to decline by 0.7 percent in 2026. When adjusted for inflation, it's expected to be down by 3 percent.

The report expects total farm-gate receipts for livestock and animal products to decline by 6 percent in 2026. Lower receipts for milk and chicken eggs are expected to drive this decline, while receipts for cattle and calves are forecast to increase.

Receipts for cattle and calves, which was Idaho's top ag commodity last year in terms of total farm-gate revenue, are forecast to increase by 4 percent, while receipts for milk, Idaho's No. 2 ag commodity in 2025, are forecast to decline by 13 percent.

With the exception of last year, milk has been Idaho's top ag commodity for the past two decades and Idaho ranks No. 4 in the United States in total milk production.

The forecast decline in



farm-gate milk revenue is not good news for Idaho's dairy operations, although high farm-level beef prices are expected to help the milk sector somewhat.

In good news for consumers tired of high egg prices, receipts for chicken eggs are forecast to decline by 66 percent, or \$17 billion, in 2026.

Total U.S. wheat receipts are expected to fall 2 percent in 2026. If realized, this would be the fourth straight year of declining farm-gate wheat revenue in the U.S., according to USDA.

Wheat is normally the state's No. 2 crop and No. 4 ag commodity in terms of total farm cash receipts. It is an important rotation crop in Idaho and is grown in 42 of the state's 44 counties.

Receipts for hay, normally the state's No. 3 crop and No. 5 ag commodity, are forecast to increase 6 percent in 2026 and corn receipts are also expected to grow, by 3 percent. Corn is one of the state's top 10 ag commodities.

USDA includes potatoes in the "vegetable and melons" category, which is expected to increase 3 percent this year. Potatoes are Idaho's No. 1 crop and No. 3 ag commodity, behind cattle and milk.

Direct federal government payments to farmers and ranchers in 2026 are forecast to increase 45 percent from 2025. However, these payments typically account for less than 1 percent of total farm revenue in Idaho. ■



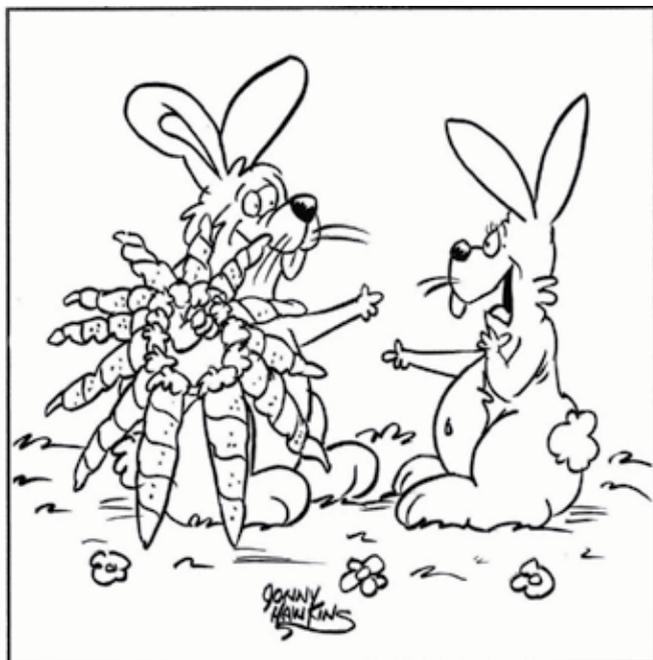
Photo by Kelbie Sweeten

# Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins



"How long have you had the lambtop?"



"Oh, you really do love me! It's a twelve-carrot ring!"

# NRCS programs can help farmers

By Heather Thomas

*For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

Jerome Faulkner, the acting Idaho state conservationist, says the Natural Resources Conservation Service works with farmers and landowners who want to do voluntary conservation and can sometimes provide technical assistance and expertise to help them make or implement a plan.

“If there is a resource concern, we may be able to work with them to address it,” he says. “Sometimes we work with local government units like the state department of agriculture or water resources, or soil conservation districts—anyone willing to do work on private land—as long as the private owner is involved. It may be a team effort to do these conservation practices.”

He says NRCS also has programs that provide financial assistance, usually in the form of cost-sharing to address a resource concern or an area NRCS and the landowner have identified as something the agency can help with.

“We have several programs we have authority to use, or we might be able to help landowners and forest users find other programs that may provide assistance, for conservation,” says Faulkner.

Andy Pappas, resource conservationist in the NRCS Idaho Falls office, formerly worked for the Utah Department of Agriculture, working with many watershed restoration projects.

“Here near Idaho Falls, farms and ranches

**LEFT: NRCS helped with this project to install a pipeline to provide water to areas on a farm that didn't have stockwater. Submitted photos**



*“Once people see the positive impact to their watersheds and their own property, they don’t tend to turn back to their old ways. Most people want the land to improve because it’s their livelihood, and they want it to be something good they can pass on to the next generation.”*

– Andy Pappas, Resource Conservationist, NRCS

get a lot of spring runoff near riparian areas,” he says. “Tillage practices—especially poor tillage practices—can be an issue when runoff from fields ends up in the waterways and have a negative impact with too much nutrient load.”

Pappas says NRCS works with producers in the area to reduce the amount of tillage while making sure farmers still get the yields they want.

Planting cover crops in the fall is encouraged, to reduce wind and water erosion.

“With the five soil health principles, we can add grazing as well,” he says.

Those five principles are: soil armor (keeping the ground covered), minimizing soil disturbance, plant diversity, continual live plant/roots, and animal impact (grazing animals).

Some farms already have livestock and can take advantage of their beneficial impact (trampling seeds into the soil, adding manure and urine as natural fertilizer, etc.), while others might opt to let a neighboring rancher graze their crop aftermath or cover crops.

The NRCS can help farms and ranches install a lot of fences, pipelines for stock water, etc.

“We also now have virtual fence options,” Pappas says. “This can help producers strip graze, rotate pastures or do high-intensity short-duration grazing on cover crops or rangeland or tame pastures.”

In riparian areas, high-intensity grazing can help manage weeds.

“We don’t have to graze these long-term or even every year,” Pappas says. “We can put together a grazing plan to protect those areas.”

Every farm and ranch is different and a plan or project can be tailored to fit the needs of each one, Pappas says.

If a certain program doesn’t fit for a producer, “we try to adapt, and come up with the best practices that might help,” he says.



**This photo shows crews working on an NRCS-supported project that fenced off riparian areas and water bodies from continual cattle use.**

“Terrain and geology can vary from place to place and even on the same property.”

Pappas says that where he worked in Utah, “We didn’t just look at crop land; we looked at crop, pasture, range and forestry and brought in partners and experts to develop the best plan, the best practices, for each individual operation.”

There are many situations across the country where farmers and ranchers can work with NRCS and other agencies to address problems in their own areas, he says. “Watersheds can be a major concern because there are extensive runoff events some years and they need to have ways to handle it without it becoming a devastating event.”

“It doesn’t take much change to have a very positive impact,” he adds. “Once people see the positive impact to their watersheds and their own property, they don’t tend to turn back to their old ways. Most people want the land to improve because it’s their livelihood, and they want it to be something good they can pass on to the next generation.”

The NRCS has several programs to help farmers and ranchers, including EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentive Program) and the CSP (Conservation Stewardship Program).

Those programs are from one to five years.

“Farmers and ranchers can work with us on environmental issues or we can improve their properties even if they are already in great shape,” Pappas says. “Our programs are always evolving and we can typically find a best fit for the landowner.

“If they don’t want to use our cost-share programs, that’s fine, too. We can continue to help them, without providing financial assistance, through conservation technical assistance.” ■



Photos courtesy of U of I

Upper Mesa Falls, shown here, is located on the Henry's Fork of the Snake River about 16 miles from Ashton.

# U of I surveys track evolution of Idahoans' water perceptions since 1988

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

BOISE – The typical Idahoan dislikes governmental regulations but values the state's water supply and would voluntarily take steps to protect and conserve it.

That characterization comes from 35 years of surveys assessing public sentiments about Idaho's water resources, conducted by Robert Mahler, a profes-

sor with University of Idaho's Department of Soil and Water Systems.

His work represents one of the nation's longest standing and most exhaustive surveys exploring public perceptions about water, and his methods have been copied by officials in 42 other U.S. states and territories.

He launched his survey in 1988 — the same year in which he helped UI Extension establish a water resources program — and conducted it every four or five years through 2023.



**Robert Mahler**

# *“To me, the increase in voluntary actions to improve the quality and quantity of Idaho’s water resources is primarily because of education.”*

– Robert Mahler, U of I Department of Soil and Water Systems

“I wanted to track the progress the university made with water education,” Mahler said. “I’ve tried to see how public attitudes have changed, and I’ve tried to use the survey to change or reenforce our direction with outreach and educational activities about water.”

As he prepares to retire from a nearly 46-year career at U of I, Mahler is seeking to raise awareness of his robust dataset so the knowledge won’t be lost.

Throughout the years, he compiled roughly 250,000 answers, which can be organized by metrics such as gender, age, zip code, education and length of time living in Idaho.

Prestigious journals are now reviewing papers he authored about the collective survey data for possible publication.

Mahler believes the survey has been instrumental in educating the public, guiding state water policy and helping UI Extension design and prioritize water programming.

“If we know the public is willing to make some changes to protect water, we can use those as best management practices,” Mahler said. “We can teach them in our Extension classes.”

Respondents consistently identified soil and water as the state’s most important natural resources.

More than 90% of survey participants considered their drinking water to be safe from 1988-2007. Drinking water perceptions have worsened over time, with at least 82% of Idahoans still believing their drinking water to be safe in 2012-23 surveys.

Mahler attributes the dip in confidence to concerns about Idaho’s increasing population coupled with increased marketing and sales of water-filtration products.

The survey found women were slightly more worried about water quality than men. Women were also more inclined to use in-home water filters.

Long-time Idaho residents were more apt to describe their water quality as being good than newcomers to the state. Furthermore, southeastern Idaho residents were more confident in their water quality than northern Idaho residents.

Since its inception, the survey shows a dramatic increase in the percentage of Idahoans who would take at least one voluntary action to protect water quality, rising from 26% in 1988 to more than 80% in 2023.

Some examples of voluntary actions offered included reduced use of fertilizers and pesticides in yards, properly disposing of household hazardous waste products, composting food waste, frequent servicing of septic tanks and safely disposing of unused pharmaceuticals.

“To me, the increase in voluntary actions to improve the quality and quantity of Idaho’s water resources is primarily because of education,” Mahler said of the rise in public willingness to voluntarily protect water. “It’s because of expanding programs.”

Another major change in perception is that Idahoans have become far more concerned about water quantity and mountain snowpack levels.

The survey asked participants to rank 15 water issues by order of importance.

Snowpack was initially ranked among the lowest-priority issues but consistently appeared as the second or third most important issue in recent surveys.

In contrast, the percentage of respondents who identify water as being important for irrigation has dropped throughout the years, which Mahler attributes to new residents from other states who are less familiar with agriculture and its value to Idaho’s economy.

Surveys from 1988 through 2012 were funded with competitive federal grants available to Extension programs for building better drinking water programs. More recent surveys were conducted using internal UI Extension funding.

Mahler estimates the survey’s margin of error at only 2-3%. For each survey, he mailed questionnaires to 3,000 randomly selected Idahoans spread throughout the state, along with a stamped envelope for them to return responses.

He mailed reminders and remailed surveys to those who failed to promptly complete it. His response rate was about 50%, roughly double the typical survey response rate.

Mahler would like Extension to continue surveying the public about water perceptions after his retirement, using updated questions and an online format to save money. He believes continuing the dataset would provide crucial information for state lawmakers.

“Our legislators are interested in anything that improves the quality of our water in the state,” Mahler said. “They’re not interested in regulating things more to do that, but they’re interested in programs that give people the ability to take voluntary actions to improve and protect our water resources.” ■



# Classifieds

## FOR SALE

Hesston 560 round baler, MC 375 continuous grain dryer, 2-1000 gal anhydrous tanks, 30ft JD 750 grain drills, 1973 Timpe hopper trailer, 1991 Western hopper trailer, 13 bottom plow, 1995 IH/loral 1200 gal spray truck, 2-6602 side hill combines. 208-251-0457.

For Sale 1962 Willys Jeep Truck 1 Ton 4x4 complete restoration 6 years to complete. It is show quality. New engine 262 c.i. has chrome headers, intake manifold is Edelbrock. Brand new pickup bed. \$35,000 spent over 80k 208-664-6125.

Pipe trailer and 90+ Ames Ball and socket Pipe 3" with risers and sprinklers. 6 Valves These were last used as corner lines around Pivot. \$3K Idaho Falls. Id 208-522-2237

2015 2990 cat skid steer, high flow, 676 hrs. \$50,000. Salmon, ID 208-768-7396.

(3) Hubbell grand father clocks all \$750.00, diving equipment, double of everything \$900.00, custom 124 hp big twin show chopper 3200 miles \$15,000 obo, Sanderson small block hugger headers \$350.00, reeses 14000lb 5th wheel hitch used 1 time no railings \$375.00, tile wet saw with table and wheels \$400.00. Orofino, Idaho 702-337-1660

2007 Dodge Ram 3500 Big Horn, HO Cummins Turbo Diesel, 178000 miles. Single owner vehicle. Contact Shawn 208-709-0576

For sale: Older John Deere Extendahoe Backhoe. New tires. \$18,000. In Pocatello.

Call Alan at 208-705-7911.

1989 Ford service truck, 2WD dually, gas, standard, flatbed, fold down hoist, Electric transfer fuel tank, tool box, more. International 3444, industrial tractor, 2WD, differential lock, loader, forward/reverse shuttle, 3 point. Take pick \$6000.00. Call 208-681-3581 for more info.

2006 Chevy 3500, 4wd, airpak welder, pipe press, LN25, 50hp pump, inventory. \$45,000 Salmon ID 208-768-7396

325 Trailblazer welder plus leads in cage. Oxy and acylelene bottle, victor torch and gauges. Reelcraft hose reels \$11,200. Salmon, ID 208-768-7396

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

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

Paying cash for old cork top embossed bottles and some telephone insulators as well as

other vintage and antique items. Call Randy. Payette, Id. 208-740-0178.

Wanted: WWI, WWII, and Vietnam war souvenirs (medals, daggers, flags, uniforms, etc.) Located in SE Idaho. Call or text 208-201-3351.

Paying cash for German & Japanese war relics/souvenirs! Pistols, rifles, swords, daggers, flags, scopes, optical equipment, uniforms, helmets, machine guns (ATF rules apply) medals, flags, etc. 208-405-9338.

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# DIRT ROAD DISCUSSIONS PODCAST

## **Episode 101 - Skijoring: Horses, Skis, Adrenaline**

Winter months in rural Idaho may lack a Friday night football game, but locals are discovering Skijoring: a sport where competitors ski behind a galloping horse, navigating jumps, grabbing rings, and trying not to break any bones. It has been described as rodeo adrenaline for participants and crowds, only you need a warm coat.

Shailee and Sage Lish got hooked on skijoring from friends in Wyoming and brought it to southeast Idaho. In this interview, they share how a tournament is set up, who participates, why hundreds come out to watch it, how to pick the right horse, and of course stories of epic crashes.