GEM STATE Producer
Idaho Farm Bureau
October 2025 • Volume 29 Issue 7

Sugar Is UnBEETable In Idaho

The Zipline

By Zippy Duvall
President, American Farm Bureau Federation

MAHA strategy recognizes importance of agriculture

Hundreds of thousands of families in America are touched by cancer every year. My family is no exception. I think we can all agree that the goal of improving health outcomes is a worthy goal, and it is supported by America's farmers and ranchers.

Farmers are dedicated to growing safe and nutritious food for all of America's families. We know that healthy lives are fueled by healthy meals, and those start on the farm.

The Make America Healthy Again, or MAHA, movement has the stated goal of addressing the causes of illness in the U.S., and it's generated a lot of interest in how our food is produced. We welcome the discussion and the renewed curiosity from America's families.

See **DUVALL,** page 6

The President's Desk

By Bryan Searle
President, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

It's a brutal time in farm country right now

Farming has historically been a cyclical ride. Sometimes farm-level commodity prices, and farmers' profitability, are up and sometimes they're down.

Right now, they are down. Way down.

It's ugly out there in farm country right now and to be frank, there's not much light at the end of the proverbial tunnel.

USDA recently forecast that farm-gate receipts – this is what farmers and ranchers receive directly for their commodity – in the U.S. will be up by a combined 5 percent this year. That is very misleading, as USDA readily points out, because most of that increase is related to the cow-calf industry.

Cash receipts for the cattle and calves industry are up significantly in 2025, as they have been for a while now, and are expected to increase by 13 percent this year compared to last year.

Cash receipts for fruits and nuts, and chicken eggs, are forecast to be up as well.

See **SEARLE,** page 6

Inside Farm Bureau

By Zak Miller
CEO, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Strong leaders, great water

There is a reason pioneers followed the Oregon Trail, not the Idaho Trail. Oregon's Willamette Valley offered an obvious destination: temperate climate, fertile soil, and 40 inches of annual precipitation.

For pioneers who could reach it, farming success was visible.

Idaho had the same agricultural potential, but it was harder to recognize. While the Willamette Valley receives only 10% of its moisture as snow, Idaho gets a state-wide average of just 18 inches of annual rainfall, making it one of America's eight driest states.

No wonder early pioneers passed through Idaho to reach Oregon; they could not see our state's hidden potential.

Fortunately, other visionaries saw Idaho differently. They recognized that Idaho had abundant water—it just looked different. While the Willamette Valley receives 90% of its moisture as rain, Idaho's precipitation is 80% snow.

See **MILLER,** page 7

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COVER: Idaho's sugarbeet industry is bigger than a lot of people realize and a major part of the state's economy. See story on page 10. Idaho Sugarbeet Growers Association photo

Photo by Colby Ward
A hay field is shown in Clark County, which recently revived its local Farm Bureau organization.

Clark County Farm Bureau revived after 35 years

By Camron Hammond
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

DUBOIS – After more than three decades, the spirit of agriculture in Clark County has found its voice again. On July 29, local farmers, ranchers, community members, and state Farm Bureau representatives gathered in Dubois to formally organize the new Clark County Farm Bureau.

A buzz of excitement filled the room as producers exchanged ideas and shared their vision for what they would like to see the new organization accomplish.

Clark County Farm Bureau was originally established in 1979. The group remained active until it was disbanded in 1990 and merged into Jefferson County Farm Bureau. In recent years, however, growing challenges for local producers and a heightened curiosity in the original organization's mission sparked renewed interest in reestablishing a Farm Bureau presence in Clark County.

Founded in 1919, Clark County is Idaho's least populous county with a population of 790 residents according to 2020 census data. The county has a total area of 1,765 square miles which is roughly about one person for every two square miles.

See **COUNTY,** page 13

A wheat field is harvested in Ririe in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo. USDA's Sept. 3 "Farm Income and Financial Forecasts for 2025" report shows wheat remains Idaho's No. 4 agricultural commodity in terms of total farm-gate revenue.

Dairy remains Idaho's top farm commodity…for now

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – Dairy in 2024 remained as Idaho's No. 1 agricultural commodity in terms of total farm-gate receipts and cattle and calves was again No. 2.

But the cattle sector may give dairy a run for its money this year in that category.

USDA data released Sept. 3 shows that farm-level Idaho milk sales brought in $3.87 billion in farm-gate receipts in 2024, up 12 percent from $3.46 billion in 2023 but below the record of $4.28 billion set in 2022.

That made milk, again, Idaho's top agricultural commodity, ahead of the cattle and calves sector, which brought in a record $3.32 billion in 2024, which was a 27 percent increase compared with 2023.

Milk has been the state's top ag commodity in total farm-gate revenue for many years, but the beef cattle sector may close in

on that title when this year's tallies are totaled up and released in 2026.

USDA's Sept. 3 "Farm Income and Financial Forecasts for 2025" report contained the first state-level estimates for farm-gate receipts in 2024. The 2025 totals will be released about the same time next year.

Farm-gate receipts are what the farmer or rancher receives for their commodity.

The USDA report forecasts total U.S. farm-gate milk receipts will decline by 4 percent in 2025 compared with 2024 and receipts for cattle and calves will increase by 13 percent.

This math, taken literally, could mean cattle and calves might catch milk for the top spot among Idaho ag commodities in 2025.

That's a big "might."

USDA's forecast of a 4 percent decrease in milk receipts is for the nation. Idaho dairies collectively produced 7 percent more milk year-over-year through the first half of 2025, according to the Idaho Dairymen's Association.

This large increase in milk volume alone could keep milk in the No. 1 spot. Of course, how farm-level beef and milk prices ultimately pan out will play a major factor as well.

Potatoes remained Idaho's top crop, and No. 3 ag commodity, with $1.24 billion in cash receipts in 2024, according to USDA. This represents a 7 percent drop compared with 2023.

Wheat retained its spot as the No. 4 ag commodity in Idaho with $597 in farm-gate receipts in 2024, down slightly from $608 million in 2023.

Hay was bumped out of the No. 5 spot by sugar beets, which brought in $508 million in farm-gate revenue in 2024, up 10 percent from 2023.

Hay came in at No. 6 with $381 million in cash receipts, down 38 percent from $614 million in 2023. This number for hay is a little misleading because it doesn't account for the hay grown in Idaho that is used on-farm and not sold. The total value of all hay produced in Idaho is much higher than that $381 million number.

Barley remained as Idaho's No. 7 ag commodity with $347 million in cash receipts in 2024, down 18 percent from $422 million in 2023.

Cash receipts for onions totaled $205 million in Idaho in 2024, a 25 percent jump from 2024. Cash receipts for Idaho onions totaled $58 million in 2020 and have increased by 253 percent since then.

Chicken eggs have become one of the state's top ag commodities in total revenue in recent years. USDA forecasts that eggs brought in a total of $141 million in cash receipts in 2024, 18 percent more than in 2023. Idaho chicken egg receipts totaled $46 million in 2021.

Corn brought in a total of $134 million in cash receipts in Idaho in 2024, down 6 percent from 2023.

Farm-gate receipts for dry beans in Idaho totaled $91 million in 2024, up 14 percent compared with 2023.

As Idaho hop acres have declined significantly in recent years, so has that ag commodity's total revenue in Idaho. Cash receipts for hops in Idaho totaled $69 million in 2024, down 24 percent from 2023 and down 34 percent from that sector's high of $105 million in 2021.

Photo by Jim Parker

USDA data shows that Idaho's cattle and calves sector brought in a record $3.32 billion in farm-gate receipts in 2024, a 27 percent increase compared with 2023.

Farm-gate revenue from hogs in Idaho soared 235 percent to $67 million in 2024.

Other Idaho agricultural commodities and their total farm-gate receipts: Trout ($45 million), peppermint oil ($23 million), floriculture ($21 million), canola ($15 million) and mustard seed ($14 million).

According to the USDA data, Idaho's 22,000-plus farmers and ranchers brought in a total of $11.79 billion in farm-gate receipts in 2024. That represents gross revenue and does not represent net farm income, which is the farmer's take-home pay once all expenses are deducted.

The USDA report shows intermediate farm production expenses in Idaho totaled $7.2 billion last year, up 6 percent from 2023. This includes expenses such as feed and seed purchases, fertilizer, pesticides, fuel and electricity, marketing, storage, transportation, repairs and irrigation.

When all other expenses, such as payments to stakeholders and labor, are factored in, USDA estimates total net farm income in Idaho in 2024 was $2.6 billion, down 13 percent from 2023 and down 33 percent compared with the 2022 total of $3.7 billion. ■

DUVALL

Continued from page 2

We also welcome the more open dialogue in recent months with MAHA Commission leaders about what it takes to keep America fed and the commitment of farmers to take care of our soil, water and other resources.

The initial MAHA Commission report in May praised farmers as partners, but undermined science and confidence in our food system. It's unfortunate farmers were excluded from the development of that first report and from helping officials understand the complexities of agriculture.

The final MAHA strategy is now out, and it reflects a greater understanding of how our food is grown, as well as opportunities to make smart, science-based improvements. That's progress, and we appreciate the open dialogue during the past few months as farmers from across the country explained the real-world challenges and opportunities they face.

The strategy includes a number of goals related to agriculture. A new focus on American-grown fresh fruits, vegetables and meat, along with reintroducing whole milk into the school meal programs can help provide a foundation for a lifetime of smart choices. Reducing or streamlining regulations in smart ways can allow farms operating on very tight margins to innovate, diversify and respond to consumer demand.

Prioritizing voluntary conservation efforts for farmers and ranchers and optimizing EPA's already robust pesticide regulatory process are welcome recommendations.

This isn't the end of the conversation, however. This is the end of the beginning. America's families want to be certain that what they put on the dinner table is safe and nutritious, and they will continue to seek out healthy and sustainable food.

'If we are going to have meaningful discussion about opportunities for improvement, we must remain open to engaging with the families who rely on us to keep their pantries stocked.'

That's why it's more important than ever for farmers to engage and share our stories with national, state and local officials. We must ensure the policymakers at all levels and our neighbors have a full understanding of the food supply chain and potential unintended consequences of recommendations that could reduce food safety and food security in America instead of increasing them.

Farmers are always looking for ways to improve, and we welcome ideas that are grounded in science and drive innovation. If we are going to have meaningful discussion about opportunities for improvement, we must remain open to engaging with the families who rely on us to keep their pantries stocked.

Answering questions gives us an opportunity to highlight just how far we've come. That's exactly what we did for the MAHA Commission and I'm thankful to all the farmers who stepped up to be part of the dialogue. ■

SEARLE

Continued from page 2

For almost every other farm commodity, however, they are down.

Milk receipts for dairy operations are forecast to be down 4 percent this year. Receipts for the vegetable industry, which includes potatoes, are expected to decline by 5 percent this year and wheat receipts are forecast to see a whopping 12 percent drop in revenue.

Milk, potatoes and wheat are Idaho's No. 1, 3 and 4 agricultural commodities in terms of total farm-gate revenue – cattle and calves ranks No. 2 – so those forecasted revenue declines are definitely not good for Idaho farmers.

At the same time as farm-level commodity prices are declining, production costs are not. In fact, USDA forecasts that total farm and ranch production expenses will be up 3 percent this year compared with last year. That's $12 billion more in expenses agricultural producers have to contend with this year, in the face of declining farm-gate revenue.

'There's no getting around the fact that many crop farmers are fighting an uphill battle right now. Hardly a day goes by when I don't get a call that goes along the lines of, "How do I keep going?"'

Total farm production expenses are expected to reach $457 billion in 2025. Ouch.

To say it's a brutal time for most farmers right now is no exaggeration.

Total U.S. crop receipts are forecast to decline by 2.5 percent this year, while receipts from animals and animal products are forecast to rise by 11 percent. Again, that increase in receipts from the animal sector will mostly come from cattle and calves.

While we're happy for our cow-calf producers, there's no getting around the fact that many crop farmers are fighting an uphill battle right now. Hardly a day goes by when I don't get a call that goes along the lines of, "How do I keep going?"

It should be noted that prices have been declining while costs continue rising for more than a couple of years now. This is not a new problem and has gotten to a point where it is extremely difficult for many farmers to remain in business.

For many if not most crops, prices right now are below the cost of production. How long can farmers survive under that scenario? I hope we don't have to find out.

Getting a new farm bill would help some, and the recently passed Big Beautiful Bill contains some agricultural provisions that will hopefully provide some help.

But what we really need right now is more trade with our global partners. To put it bluntly, not enough agricultural commodities are leaving the U.S. right now. We have to export and right now we are not exporting near enough.

Again, this not a new problem that suddenly materialized this year. Difficulties in agricultural trade have been going on for more than four years. We are reaping the results of inaction on ag trade for several years now.

Where or who to assess blame for this situation is for another day. We need more trade and sooner rather than later. In fact, we need it yesterday.

I don't intend this to be a "woe is us" column. I wrote it so people realize the realities of what our farmers and ranchers are facing.

Hopefully, it can serve as some type of rallying cry to help push our elected officials to do what needs to be done to turn this situation around. ■

MILLER

Continued from page 2

These pioneers understood that the Gem State's nickname came from treasures in the hills, revealed only after the snow melted. Idaho's agricultural transformation began when pioneers learned to capture Mother Nature's abundant water stored as snow in the high country.

Through proper planning and infrastructure, this water made Idaho an agricultural powerhouse. Today, Idaho has surpassed Oregon in agricultural production: $11.8 billion in farm cash receipts in 2024 compared to Oregon's $7 billion.

'Idaho still has pioneers. We need to offer our support to secure our water future.'

Our history is remarkable. Early pioneers, using horses and scrapers, constructed canals across the state. Most are still in use today. They envisioned mighty rivers controlled by dams that could store melted snow to offset dry summers.

Through irrigation, they transformed our dry climate into an agricultural advantage, creating conditions for abundant crop production. We owe these visionaries immense gratitude for their foresight and dedication.

Unfortunately, recent generations cannot claim the same pioneering spirit. Idaho's last major dam, Dworshak Dam in Clearwater County, was completed in 1973—over 50 years ago. Much has changed in Idaho during those five decades.

While our water management science and measurements have evolved and improved to impressive levels, management alone is not sufficient for our growing and changing state. Despite excellent managers and leaders, we need renewed pioneering leadership to continue Idaho's legacy of stewarding our most incredible natural resource: water.

Fortunately, modern pioneers and visionaries still exist. In the 2025 legislative session, Idaho legislators drafted and signed Senate Joint Memorial 101, declaring that Idaho must invest in water infrastructure. This memorial calls upon Idaho's federal representatives and citizens to invest more boldly in Idaho's water future.

Senator Kevin Cook led this memorial effort and passionately advocated for Idaho's water development. He is supported by dedicated allies, including Representative Rod Furnis, who sponsored the House version, along with cosponsors: Senators Van Burtenshaw, Mark Harris, Doug Ricks, Joshua Kohl, and Representatives Barbara Ehardt, Ben Fuhriman, Stephanie Mickelsen, and Jerald Raymond.

Our Washington, D.C., leaders have heard Senator Cook and Idaho legislators' call, but they question whether this memorial reflects Idaho's true priorities.

Our state legislators have diligently collected signatures from Idahoans who believe our water investment days are not over. Senator Cook's vision extends 100 years into the future—a legislator thinking far beyond his next election. We are blessed with leaders who work beyond personal interests.

Farm Bureau fully supports Senate Joint Memorial 101 and the leaders working to implement it. Please discuss SJM 101 with your legislators and sign the SJM 101 petition at www.keepidahowater.com.

Idaho still has pioneers. We need to offer our support to secure our water future. ■

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PS Form 3526, July 2014

Idaho ranchers celebrate Beef Counts program

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

MERIDIAN – Idaho's ranching community supports a program aimed at making sure beef can be what's for dinner for everyone, especially those who can least afford it.

The Idaho beef community created its Beef Counts program to provide the funds necessary to purchase beef for Idahoans in need.

Created in 2010, the program has distributed more than 2.6 million 3-ounce servings of beef through the Idaho Foodbank's statewide network.

The program is a partnership between the Idaho Cattle Association, Idaho CattleWomen, the Idaho Beef Council and Boise-based Agri Beef, which matches up to $50,000 in cash or in-kind donations to the Beef Counts program each year.

These groups recently celebrated and promoted the program with a labeling event at the Idaho Foodbank location in Meridian that had volunteers placing Beef Counts labels on beef packages prepared for distribution to needy Idahoans.

Dozens of volunteers from various segments of Idaho's beef industry showed up for this event, which was also a chance to educate people about the Beef Counts program.

From a donation perspective, protein is expensive and hard to get, Idaho Foodbank CEO Randy Ford said during the labeling event. Protein is one of the least commonly donated items to the Idaho Foodbank, he said.

Less than 5 percent of the Foodbank's funding comes from government; the rest comes from donations, and programs like Beef Counts have a significant impact, he added.

"This is a fantastic (program) for the Idaho Foodbank to be involved in and we're very thankful for all of the cattle producers across the state and the partnership we have with them," Ford said. "It really makes a difference."

"The whole purpose of Beef Counts is so that Idaho's ranchers, farmers and the cattle industry can give back to their communities by providing a high-quality protein, beef, to the Idaho Foodbank so they can distribute it statewide year-round," said Weiser rancher and Idaho Beef Council board member Bruce Kerner.

ABOVE: **Volunteers from Idaho's ranching community put Beef Counts labels on beef packages prepared for Idahoans in need, July 9 at the Idaho Foodbank facility in Meridian.** RIGHT: T**he Idaho Beef Counts program has distributed more than 2.6 million 3-ounce servings of beef since it was created in 2010.** Photos by Sean Ellis

Ford said the state's beef industry isn't the only agriculture sector in Idaho that helps the Foodbank.

"We have agricultural partners across the state," he said. "We get donations mainly from the produce side, so potatoes, onions, asparagus, watermelon, berries and other fruits, apples, from all over the state. I feel so fortunate to be in this state. We have such a vibrant and giving agricultural community."

The labeling event was held in July, which is Beef Month in Idaho.

Beef cattle is Idaho's No. 2 agricultural commodity in terms of total farm-gate revenue and the state's ranchers brought in an estimated $2.9 billion in revenue in 2024.

There are about 2.5 million cattle and calves in Idaho. Including all segments of the industry, the sector has an economic impact of billions of dollars in Idaho. ■

Sugarbeets pay the bills in farm country

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – Sugarbeets are a unique, humble crop that pays the bills for a lot of Idaho farms.

The crop is not on the state's license plates and Idaho is not known among the public for producing it. But sugarbeets do play an important role in Idaho farm country.

"They're a stable crop with stable production despite changes in weather from year to year," says Rupert farmer Duane Grant, who has been growing sugarbeets for 45 years. "They have generally stable pricing and, in many ways, they've been the mortgage payer."

Nate Garner has been growing sugarbeets in Idaho's Raft River Valley for 12 year and his family has been growing them for more than half a century.

"Sugarbeets are our bread and butter," he says. "That's our main crop that we grow. I've heard many people say sugarbeets pays the bills and it really does."

Sugarbeets are a root crop and when fully mature are about the size of a football. Each one weighs about 3-5 pounds. They're planted in March or April and harvested in late fall.

More than 400 farmers in Idaho typically grow about 170,000 acres of sugarbeets each year. They are sold to Amalgamated Sugar Co., which is owned by growers in Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

Between those three states, about 180,000 acres of beets are grown by about 600 farmers, who combined grow enough sugarbeets to produce 12 percent of the sugar consumed in the United States.

"We have a really vibrant and healthy sugarbeet industry," says Samantha Parrott, executive director of the Snake River Sugarbeet Growers Association.

Farmers in Idaho, Oregon and Washington own shares to grow sugarbeets and there is pent-up demand for them, Parrott says.

"People want to grow sugarbeets," she says. "It's a really good

Idaho Sugarbeet Growers Association photos

crop to be in and it's a great crop for our farmers to have in their rotation."

Sugarbeets are a very different crop to grow than many other of the main crops grown in Idaho, such as potatoes, onions, dry beans or grains, says Nolan Harper, who grows sugarbeets in the small community of Idahome in Cassia County.

"I have plenty of nieces and nephews … that live in the cities and when they come out during beet harvest, they are fascinated by sugarbeets," he says.

"It's a very unique crop," Harper says. "They're big and heavy and the amount of tonnage that comes off of the field is pretty amazing to most people."

Idaho ranks No. 2 in the nation in total sugarbeet production and the industry has a major impact on the state's economy.

They're so important, particularly in rural areas, that the city of Rupert drops a giant sugarbeet to ring in the new year.

"I don't know what the overall footprint is, but it's a pretty significant impact," Garner says.

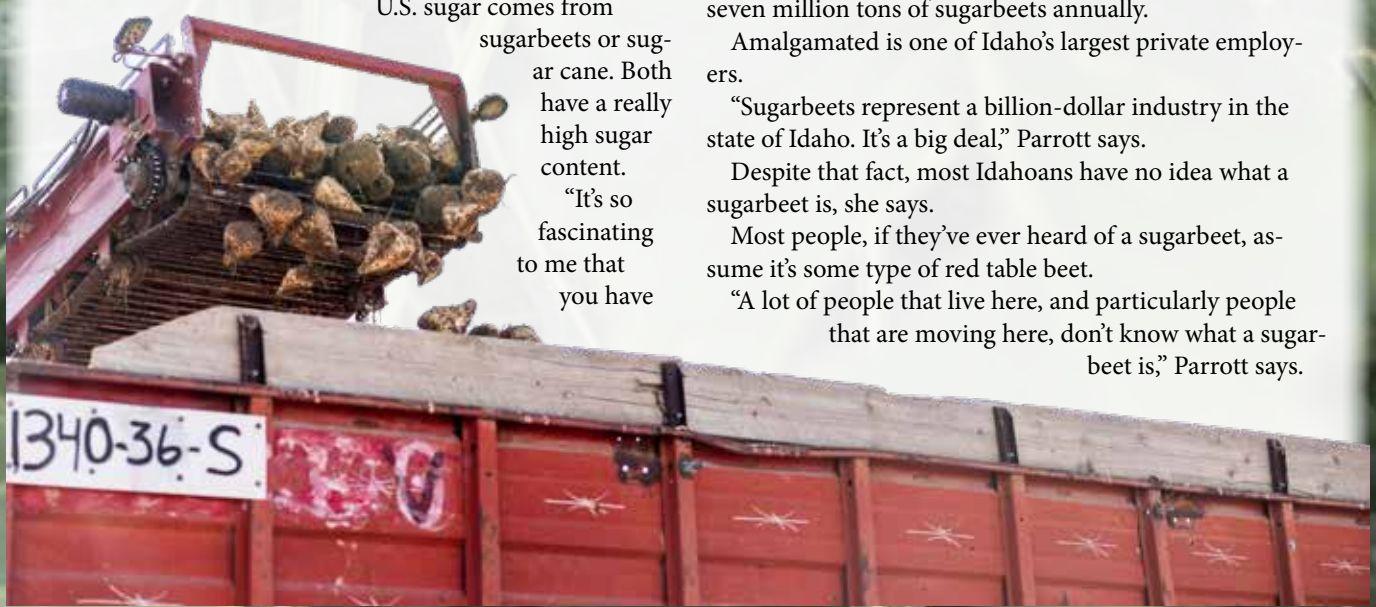
The United States has a sugar policy, which is outlined in the farm bill and regulates the flow of sugar into the country. This helps provide stability to price, Parrott says.

"The word that I use to describe our industry to people is stability," she says. "It's a very stable crop. It's a real reliable crop for growers."

"Because we have sugar policy in the farm bill, that provides stability to the price," she adds. "Not only for the grower but for the consumer as well."

Because Amalgamated growers need shares to plant sugarbeets, the amount of acres planted is pretty stable from year to year.

"I love that about our industry, that it is so stable and predictable and reliable," Parrott says.



"It's so fascinating to me that you have a sugarbeet that grows underground and then you have sugar cane that grows above ground … and can get as tall as a basketball hoop. These two crops couldn't be more different, but their end product is exactly the same."

– Samantha Parrott, executive director, Snake River Sugarbeet Growers Association

U.S. sugar comes from sugarbeets or sugar cane. Both have a really high sugar content.

"It's so fascinating to me that you have a sugarbeet that grows underground and then you have sugar cane that grows above ground … and can get as tall as a basketball hoop," Parrott says. "These two crops couldn't be more different, but their end product is exactly the same."

In Idaho, sugarbeets contain about 18 percent sugar and one sugarbeet contains about one cup of sugar.

In Idaho, there are three Amalgamated processing facilities – Paul, Twin Falls and Nampa – that turn the beets into sugar. These facilities combined process more than seven million tons of sugarbeets annually.

Amalgamated is one of Idaho's largest private employers.

"Sugarbeets represent a billion-dollar industry in the state of Idaho. It's a big deal," Parrott says.

Despite that fact, most Idahoans have no idea what a sugarbeet is, she says.

Most people, if they've ever heard of a sugarbeet, assume it's some type of red table beet.

"A lot of people that live here, and particularly people that are moving here, don't know what a sugarbeet is," Parrott says.

Idaho ranks No. 2 in the nation in total sugarbeet production and the industry has a major impact on the state's economy.

"Most people don't know that half of the sugar, at least in North America, comes from sugarbeets."

– Duane Grant, Rupert sugarbeet farmer

"Probably 99 percent of the non-farming population, if you say sugarbeet, they think they're some red beet variety," Grant says. "That's really all the consumer knows, is the red beet."

The sugarbeet industry has made significant strides when it comes to technology and research breakthroughs. These technological advances have made it easier and more reliable to grow the crop, according to farmers.

In 2005, sugarbeets were approved to use what is known as "Roundup Ready" technology, a genetic modification in beets that allow them to resist the glyphosate weed killer.

"That was such a game-changer for our industry and that has really helped our growers take it to the next level," says New Plymouth sugarbeet farmer Galen Lee.

With modern genetics, beet farmers have been able to substantially increase their yields, Grant said.

When he started farming, if growers were able to get 20 tons of sugarbeets per acre and achieve 16 percent sugar content, "we considered ourselves very successful. That was a money-making level."

Today, sugarbeet farmers are getting 40 tons an acre and hitting 18-plus percent sugar content.

Throw in the weed control system that Roundup Ready technology allows and "all of that adds up to make them a really fun crop to grow," Grant says.

While genetic modification technology is used in the sugarbeet seed, once the sugar is extracted from a sugarbeet, the end product is identical to cane sugar, Parrott says.

If you look under a microscope, there is no difference at the molecular level between beet and cane sugar, she says.

"A sugarbeet is GMO but the sugar is not because it goes through the process and there is no plant matter left," she says. "Our sugar is not GMO. It does not have to be labeled GMO because it is not. The end product is identical to cane sugar."

Napoleon spurred commercial sugarbeet production in France in the early 1800s after English naval blockades cut off France's supply of sugar.

"We really have him to thank for the commercialization of sugarbeets," Grant says. "About (200) years after Napoleon, most people don't know that half of the sugar, at least in North America, comes from sugarbeets." ■

Continued from page 3

Despite being small in population, interested Farm Bureau members felt it was important to band together to represent the needs of agricultural producers in their area.

"Clark County and the West Jefferson area are unique regions built and supported by our farmers and ranchers," said Lindsey Miller, Clark County Farm Bureau secretary. "We are excited to give a voice through our county Farm Bureau to our producers facing tough issues like water management, pest control, and ranching on public lands. For our small communities to succeed, our farmers and ranchers must succeed."

According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, there were 67 farms and ranches in Clark County during the 2022 census year and a total of 206,000 acres of land in farming. Farmers and ranchers in Clark County sold a total of $49 million worth of agricultural products in 2022.

The main crops in the county during the 2022 census year were hay (38,627 acres), wheat (7,257 acres), barley (4,799) and corn (1,518). There were also 11,884 cattle and calves in Clark County in 2022.

After working with Jefferson County Farm Bureau, the new organization will also include members from western Jefferson County communities, including Hamer, Monteview, and the Mud Lake area. Its total membership is roughly about 300, which makes it the smallest county Farm Bureau in Idaho.

During the organizational meeting, members adopted bylaws, elected officers, and set goals for outreach and advocacy efforts. The discussion centered on facilitating opportunities where producers can come together to solve problems, develop policy, and give back to their communities.

Clark County Farm Bureau wasted no time getting involved by voting to purchase $6,000 worth of livestock to support 4-H kids at both the West Jefferson and Clark County fairs.

The newly elected board of directors includes:

Submitted photo

Board members of the newly formed Clark County Farm Bureau.

- Conni Owen, president (Dubois)
- Caleb Ball, vice president (Hamer)
- Lindsey Miller, secretary (Monteview)
- Stephanie Eddins, treasurer (Dubois)
- Lisa Ward, co-promotion & engagement chair (Monteview)
- Chandra Day, co-promotion & engagement chair (Monteview)
- Addisen Briggs, co-Young Farmers & Ranchers chair (Monteview)
- Cheyenne Jensen, co-Young Farmers & Ranchers chair (Dubois)
- Andy Miller (Monteview)
- Tanner Fuchs (Monteview)
- Benson Briggs (Monteview)

Clark County Farm Bureau will also work to empower the future of agriculture by connecting with youth programs, including FFA chapters in the area. A significant focus will be on supporting younger producers through the Young Farmers & Ranchers program, which helps cultivate the next generation of agricultural leaders.

"YF&R gives a sense of community to agriculturists with the same struggles and dreams," said Addisen Briggs, Clark County Farm Bureau co-YF&R chair. "Through our efforts, we hope to highlight not only the differences in operations, but the similarities that will unite us and make local agriculture stronger."

Looking forward, Clark County Farm Bureau leaders say the organization aims to become a strong voice for local producers by advocating for agricultural policies at both the county and state level. They hope the organization will serve as a trusted resource in addressing challenges facing farmers and ranchers while strengthening the future of agriculture in the region.

To kick off that vision, the group is planning a "Salute to Ag" dinner and program on Oct. 25 at the Dubois Community Center.

"We are thrilled to have this great organization active in our communities once again," said Conni Owen, Clark County Farm Bureau president. "We are already seeing the benefits of Farm Bureau involvement and can't wait to see what the future holds for Clark County Farm Bureau."

Clark County Farm Bureau is the 38th county Farm Bureau in Idaho, representing one of the state's most rural populations. For more information or to get involved, please contact Stephanie Eddins at clarkcountyfb@idahofb.org. ■

Photos by Sean Ellis

Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, center, poses for a photo with representatives of some of Idaho's main agricultural commodities Aug. 20 at Obendorf Farms in Parma. Shown in this photo are onions, sugar beets and hops. Crapo and Idaho ag industry leaders talked about how passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill will help farmers and ranchers.

Crapo highlights ag wins in Big Beautiful Bill

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

PARMA – The One Big Beautiful Bill Act represents a major win for farmers and ranchers, Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, told Idaho agriculture industry representatives Aug. 20.

"This bill did more for the agriculture industry than maybe any other industry," Crapo said during a tour of Obendorf Farms, where he highlighted key provisions for farmers and ranchers included in the bill (OBBB). "The parts in the bill that benefited agriculture were so numerous that I have to have a set of papers here to read from … in order to make sure I cover it all."

People representing some of Idaho's main agricultural commodities were on hand to explain how the provisions of the act will benefit farmers and ranchers.

The bill, signed into law on July 4, "preserves Farm Bureau-supported provisions, strengthens the farm safety net and

offers longer-term certainty for farmers and ranchers navigating rising input costs, volatile markets and weather uncertainty," American Farm Bureau Federation economists wrote in a Market Intel report about the OBBB.

They said the act is projected to increase agriculture-focused spending by about $66 billion over the next decade.

"The One Big Beautiful Bill Act delivers long-overdue policy certainty by strengthening core safety net programs, enhancing risk management tools and locking in important tax provisions for family farms," the AFBF economists wrote. "It reflects many of Farm Bureau's top priorities and offers measurable wins for producers navigating an increasingly complex farm economy."

One provision of the act that should put a smile on every farmer in the room's face, Crapo said, is the one that provides estate tax relief for family farms by making the "death tax" exemption permanent at $15 million per individual or $30 million per couple and indexes it for inflation.

Without this change, the death tax exemption was due to drop back to $5.5 million after 2025.

Crapo's comments about the death tax provision brought applause.

Raising the death tax exemption "is a huge win for us," said Kim Brackett, who spoke on behalf of the cattle industry at the Crapo event. "We will continue to advocate for complete repeal of the death tax, but this is a huge increase and a major step forward providing greater certainty for Idaho's cattle producers in family transition planning."

Crapo noted that the bill extends the U.S. sugar program through 2031 and includes other provisions sought by the sugar industry.

Idaho ranks No. 2 in sugar beet production in the country and sugar is a billion-dollar industry in Idaho, said Samantha Parrott, executive director of the Snake River Sugarbeet Growers Association.

"Without a new farm bill, this legislation became our best path to address the needs of the sugar industry," she said.

Some of the provisions in the bill might sound like technical changes to most people, "but for growers it means stability," Parrott said. "And that stability helps them grow their operation, invest in equipment, hire workers, and it keeps farms in the family for the next generation."

"Food production should always be a priority on a federal level and safety nets are vital to guarantee there's a tomorrow for agriculture businesses."

– Cory Coles, Obendorf Farms

She said provisions in the bill "represent the most meaningful update to the U.S. sugar policy in the history of the program. While we still have more work to do with the upcoming farm bill, the OBBB act is a major victory…."

The bill extends dairy margin coverage through 2031. Milk is Idaho's No. 1 ag commodity in terms of total farm-gate revenue.

The bill increases premium support for beginning farmers and ranchers by expanding USDA's definition from five to 10 years of experience. This will enable more producers to qualify for assistance over a longer period of time.

It supports investments in agriculture research and conservation programs and agriculture trade opportunities. It strengthens crop insurance, including extending coverage for beginning farmers and ranchers.

"Crop insurance remains a cornerstone of the farm safety net, and the bill makes several significant updates to strengthen and modernize the program through 2031," the AFBF economists wrote in their Market Intel report.

The bill's strengthened crop insurance and disaster aid programs "will help us weather unpredictable events, whether it's severe weather, a drought or even helping in a market downturn in the industry," said Brock Obendorf, owner of Obendorf Farms, which produces hops, onions, sugar beets, corn, cattle and wheat.

He said there are several pieces of the bill "that will benefit the future of agriculture. The bill strengthens our ability to keep growing high-quality crops, sustain rural economies and compete in global markets."

Corey Coles, who manages the sale of onions at Obendorf Farms and is a member of the Idaho-East Oregon Fruit and Vegetable Association, spoke about how provisions of the OBBB will benefit the onion industry and all of agriculture.

While farmers would rather depend on a free market and limited government support, "food production should always be a priority on a federal level and safety nets are vital to guarantee there's a tomorrow for agriculture businesses," he said ... "This helps to ensure the family farm can still play a vital role in the production ag world when prices fall to below break-even levels for extended periods of time."

Brackett, a cattle producer in Owyhee County and vice president of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, highlighted several provisions of the OBBB that she said would help her operation and the entire industry.

"There are some real key components of the farm bill that were addressed in the (bill) for cattle producers," she said.

These provisions will allow "us as cattle producers to keep more of what we're actually earning … (and) reinvest back in our operations," Brackett said.

While the bill contains numerous provisions that farmers and ranchers wanted to see addressed in a new farm bill, it doesn't preclude the need for an updated farm bill, Crapo said. However, he added, it should make it "easier to get that bill over the line."

In their Market Intel report, the AFBF economists wrote that the OBBB is not a complete substitute for a new farm bill.

"Crafted through the reconciliation process, the (OBBB) was shaped by budget and jurisdictional limits that excluded several important areas of farm and rural policy," they wrote. ■

Inflation and interest continue driving up farmers' costs

By Bernt Nelson
American Farm Bureau Federation Economist

In 2020, the Federal Reserve (the Fed) responded to an acute recession by cutting interest rates and launching large-scale asset purchases to support credit and stimulate demand. Then, inflation in 2021 and 2022 reached levels not seen since the 1980s.

To combat this, the Fed began raising interest rates in March 2022 to slow demand and reel in the money supply. While inflation has since softened, so too have prices for many of the crops grown by U.S. farmers.

Meanwhile, interest rates remain above typical 21st-century levels as the Fed works to address inflation. This Market Intel provides an update on inflation and the impacts on farmers.

Inflation

Inflation is the rate at which the prices for goods and services rise. As inflation increases, it pulls down the purchasing power of money, meaning each dollar does not go as far. According to the Fed, a healthy level of inflation to reflect general economic growth is about 2%.

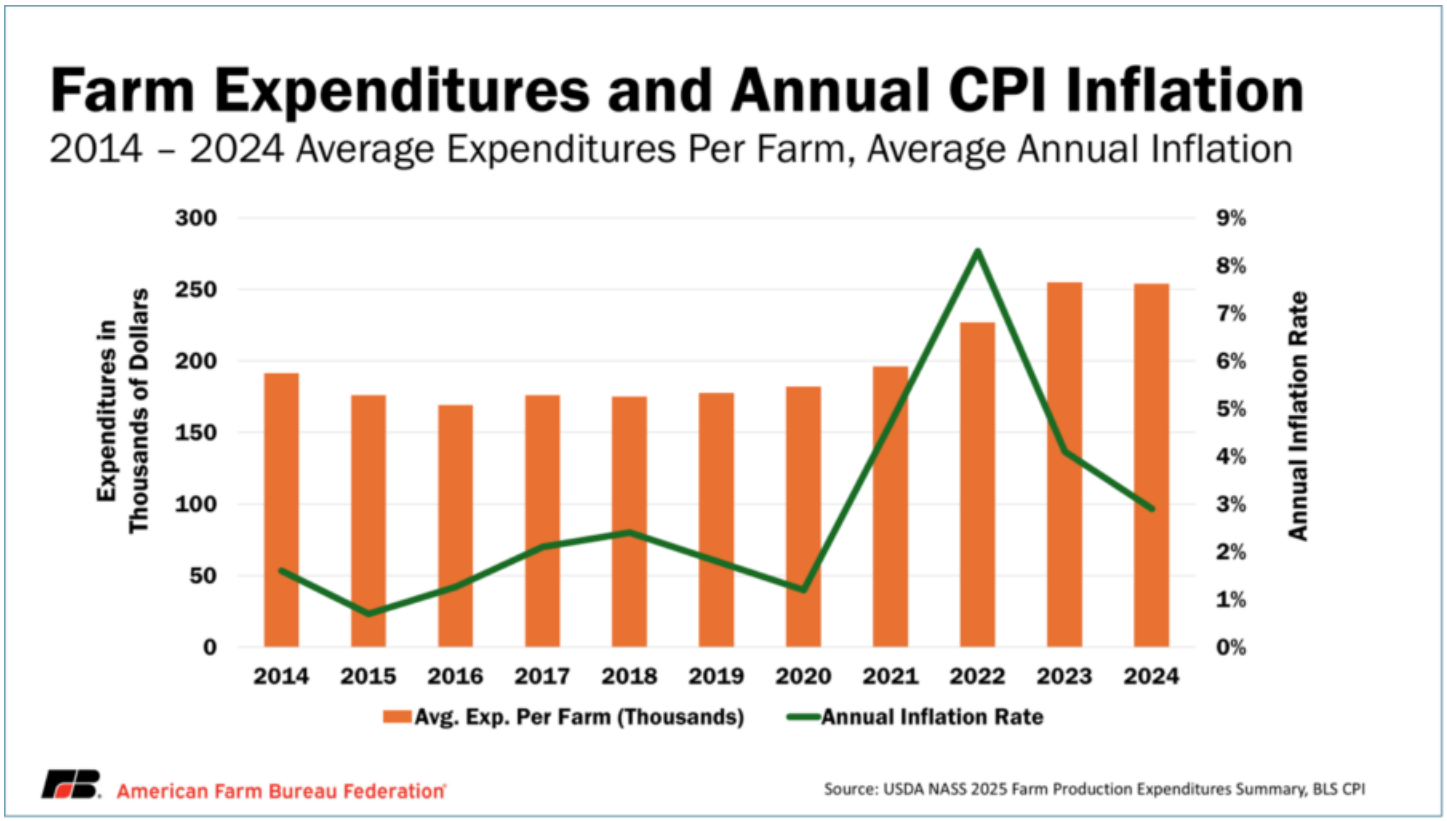
The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) measures inflation using their Consumer Price Index (CPI) The most recent report was released on Aug. 12 and found that the July CPI was 2.7% higher than a year ago, on par with June projections and below general expectations.

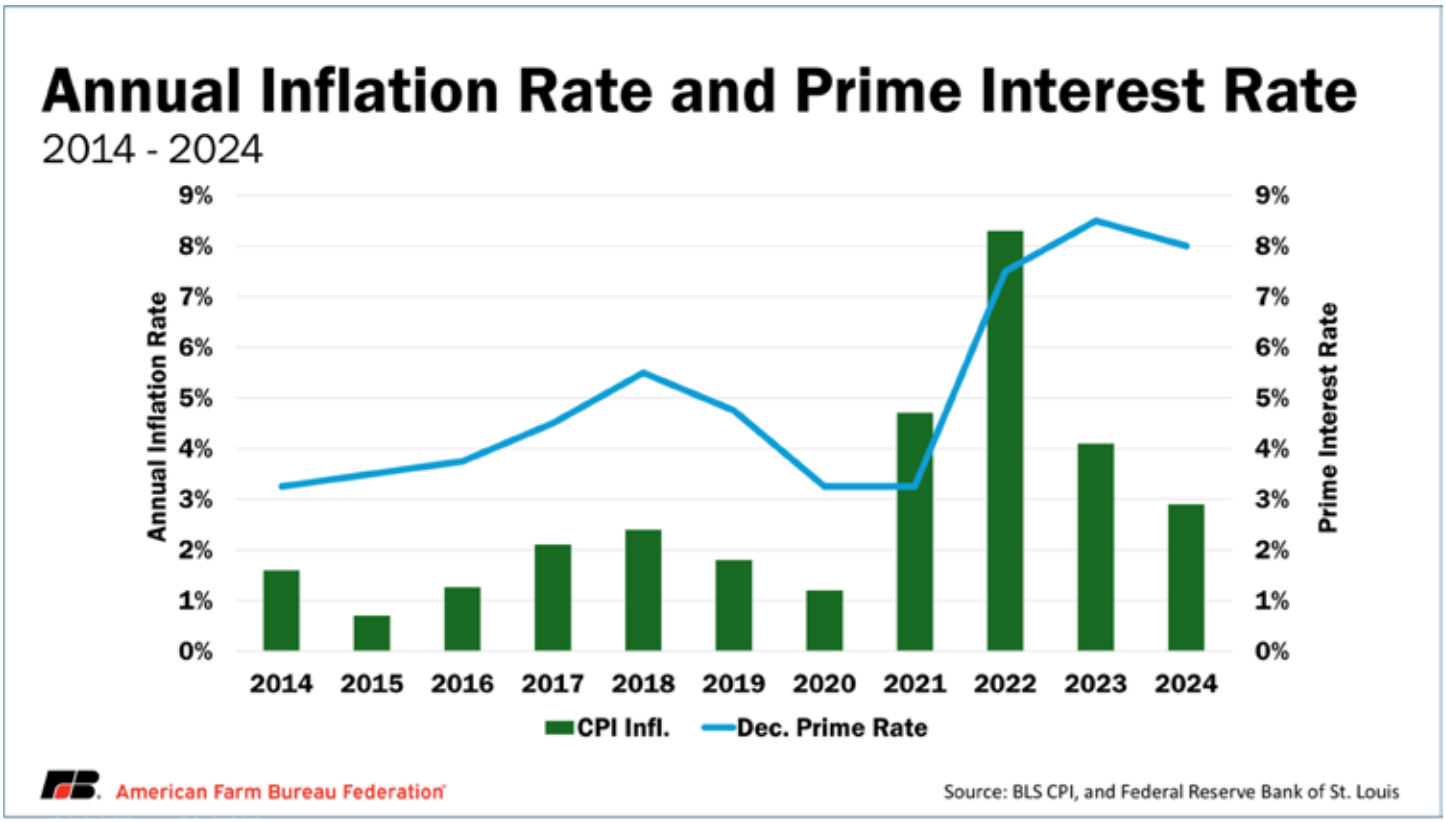
'A lower inflation rate does not mean goods and services are getting cheaper; rather, it means prices are increasing at a slower pace.'

Core inflation for goods and services minus food and energy is typically more volatile and hit a five-month high of 3.1%, which is slightly higher than expected by analysts.

The Fed's primary tool to help steer the economy is the effective federal funds rate (EFFR). This is the rate banks charge to lend their excess deposits to one another to meet minimum reserve requirements.

Changes in the federal funds rate directly influence the interest rates for mortgages, auto loans, credit cards and business financing. When rates go down, banks can lend at lower costs, making it cheaper for consumers to borrow and spend and for businesses to invest, which increases demand. The opposite happens when interest rates go up.





Farm impacts

A lower inflation rate does not mean goods and services are getting cheaper; rather, it means prices are increasing at a slower pace. For farmers and ranchers, the cost of growing crops and caring for livestock has gone up exponentially in recent years. At the same time, farmers remain at the mercy of slipping commodity prices, volatile weather conditions and an uncertain trade environment.

USDA's 2025 Farm Production Expenditures Annual Summary contains the 2024 estimates of farm production expenditures like feed, farm services, rent, agricultural chemicals, fertilizer, lime and soil conditioners, interest, taxes (real estate and property), labor, fuel, farm supplies and repairs, farm improvements and construction, tractors and self-propelled farm machinery, other farm machinery, seeds and plants, trucks and autos.

According to the report, total U.S. farm expenditures in 2024 are estimated at $477.6 billion, down about $4.3 billion (0.9%) from the record-setting $481.9 billion in 2023. The average expenditure per farm was $254,043 in 2024, down slightly from the record-high $255,047 in 2023.

Lower inflation is partially behind the drop in expenditures because it slowed down the rise in supply costs. More importantly, falling commodity prices have reduced the price of feed for livestock.

Farm expenses have been consistently higher than the prices received for crops grown for the last five years, according to USDA's price indexes for crop producers. The gap between prices received and prices paid has grown wider due to falling prices, particularly since 2023, but this long-term trend indicates that even higher prices have not been enough to combat the rise of input and supply costs.

Corn and soybeans account for about 52% of all planted crop acres in the U.S., making them a significant contributor to farm revenue across the country. In the August World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE) report, USDA forecasted the average farm price for corn to be $3.90 per bushel in 2025/26, 35% below the marketing year average (MYA) price of $6 per bushel in 2022/23.

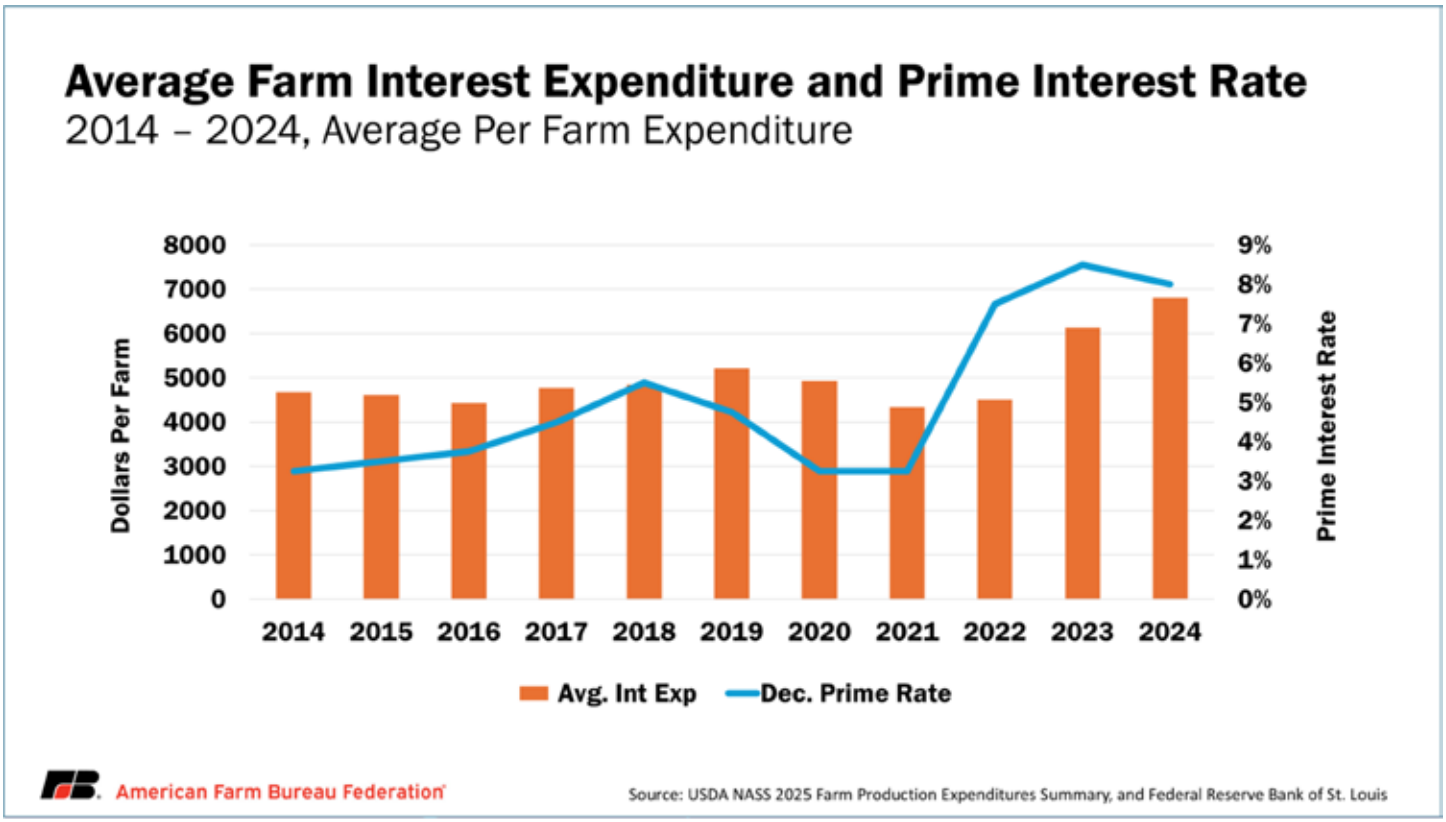
USDA forecast the average farm price for soybeans at $10.25 per bushel in 2025/26, 23% below the 2022/23 MYA price of $13.30 per bushel. These prices, well below breakeven for the third year in a row, have driven farms to increasingly rely on credit to continue operating.

Credit

Following the Fed's adjustments since 2022, the EFFR is currently 4.33, up from near-zero levels in 2020. EFFR is calculated daily and it's important to note that EFFR is different from the federal funds target rate.

The increases in the EFFR have a substantial influence on the prime interest rate in the U.S. The prime rate is the minimum interest that banks charge their most credit-worthy customers for borrowing money.

The current prime rate is 7.5% and was set Dec. 19, 2024. The bottom line is, when the Fed increased rates, they dramatically increased the cost of borrowing money across the economy. This has happened at a time when farmers and ranchers rely more



heavily on credit due to the growing gap between commodity prices and input costs.

The rise in interest rates has driven up the cost of borrowing money. According to USDA estimates, the average farm spent about $6,809, 2.7% of their total expenses, on interest in 2024. The total average interest expenditure per farm has increased by 46%, or $2,173, from $4,672 to $6,809.

Meanwhile, overall expenditures have risen 33%, from $191,500 in 2014 to $254,043. The sharp rise in total farm expenditures means the steep increase in interest costs still represents only a modest share of overall spending, but credit is more critical in low price years, making it a crucial expense that continues to increase.

While the interest increase of $2,173 per farm might seem smaller than expected, it's important to remember that not all farms carry recurring debt. This stark gap is also partly due to USDA's broad definition of a farm, which includes any operation with more than $1,000 in ag product sales — a threshold that encompasses many very small-scale or lifestyle farms not intended to provide primary income.

A financing tool commonly used by farmers and ranchers is an operating loan. An operating loan is a type of short-term loan to cover the day-to-day costs of running the farm or ranch. These loans are typically paid off and renewed every year.

According to USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS), about 22% of farms carried debt of some kind in 2022 when the Fed began raising interest rates.

Interest rates for operating loans nearly doubled between the first quarter of 2021 and the first quarter of 2023. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, the median operating loan interest rate was slightly below 8% for the second consecutive quarter of 2025.

Despite increasing costs of credit, farmers continue to borrow more. The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago notes about 40% of ag bankers expected higher operating, feeder cattle and FSA guaranteed loan volumes this year than last.

Higher interest rates combined with higher loan volumes have only elevated the losses being endured by many farms for the third consecutive year as they struggle to cover daily growing expenses.

The U.S. has lost 20,000 farms since the last Census of Agriculture. The census indicated 142,000 farms were lost between 2017 and 2022, that's more than 77 farms per day. Worsening credit conditions are likely to add to farm losses and bankruptcies in the days ahead.

Conclusion

Without question, inflation impacts every family in America. Small businesses like farms and ranches are especially impacted by increased cost of their inputs (like seed and fertilizer) coupled with higher interest rates on the yearly operating loans necessary to acquire those critical inputs.

And layered on top of inflation and the cost of interest, are plummeting crop prices and significant declines in agricultural exports. Farm country is hoping for a break in any one of the challenges they face. ■

Idaho chip company opens new headquarters

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

CALDWELL – Kyle Nehring and his wife, Amy, started their potato chip business in their basement, bagging potato chips after work and getting excited when they bagged enough to fill up the kitchen table.

Now, their company, Teton Valley Brands, is producing about 10,000 bags of chips a day "and this is just the beginning," Kyle said Aug. 20 at the grand opening of the company's new headquarters in Caldwell.

The new headquarters is about four times bigger than the previous one in Nampa and provides plenty of room for growth.

Teton Valley Brands' Real Idaho Potato Chips brand is growing rapidly, Kyle told about 50 people, including Gov. Brad Little, who showed up for the groundbreaking.

"We've seen a lot of growth recently," he said.

Kyle told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation the company is proud of its Idaho roots and wants to represent what's best about the state and its iconic potato industry.

"It's such a fantastic brand that Idaho has," he said. "We're so proud of our Idaho roots ... Idaho is famous around the world for potatoes, obviously. Everyone knows that."

Cranney Farms, a fifth-generation farm based in Oakley, is the primary supplies of potatoes to Teton Valley Brands, which also produces branded potato chips specifically for University of Idaho and Boise State University.

"Our company's goal is to represent everything great about Idaho," Kyle said. "So we wanted to make sure we partnered with a farm with deep Idaho roots, and Cranney's farm is exactly that."

Photos by Sean Ellis

Gov. Brad Little samples potato chips Aug. 20 during a groundbreaking ceremony for Teton Valley Brands' new headquarters building in Caldwell. The company is currently producing about 10,000 bags of potato chips per day and this new facility gives it room for growth, said founder Kyle Nehring.

"It's been a great partnership we're super excited about," Cranney CEO Ryan Cranney told IFBF.

Teton Valley Brands CEO Matt Price thanked Cranney Farms and all the other people involved with the company's success over the years.

"This doesn't happen with just a couple people," he said.

Teton Valley Brands recently started a new line of chips made with 100 percent American Wagyu beef tallow supplied by Idaho-based Agri Beef, the parent company of Snake River Farms, the largest producer of Wagyu beef in North America.

"The tallow just has such a unique richness to it and we've seen the market really excited about that," Kyle told IFBF. "Customers have given us phenomenal feedback about that. We're real excited about that product."

Kyle said it took everything to get the company started and the first facility was funded with some money from his parents and the sale of his and Amy's house.

"We're not like that anymore; we promise," he joked to the crowd. "But it really took everything to get this company going."

Teton Valley Brands' story is one of hard work and perseverance, Little said during the groundbreaking.

"This is really a great story," he said, adding that he was impressed when he found out Kyle is the head taster for the company.

"From the soil to the shelf, they're involved in every step of the way," he said about the company's founders. "We've spent a lot of time and effort on that Idaho potato brand. This is just very, very Idaho: Families. Start from nothing. Great ideas. Hard work. All of that. It's just an iconic Idaho story and I'm very proud to be here today." ■

LEFT: Teton Valley Brands recently started a new line of chips made with 100 percent American Wagyu beef tallow supplied by Idaho-based Agri Beef.

University of Idaho photos

A University of Idaho Extension trial shows early promise for east-central Idaho farmers and ranchers hoping to raise two forage crops from a single field within the region's short growing season.

U of I study shows promise for raising, grazing cover crops after grain harvest

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

MOSCOW, Idaho – An ongoing University of Idaho Extension trial shows early promise for east-central Idaho farmers and ranchers hoping to raise two forage crops from a single field within the region's short growing season.

The trial is in its second growing season at U of I's Nancy M. Cummings Research, Extension and Education Center in Salmon and will continue for another one to three years. Led by Extension beef specialist John Hall, the project entails planting fall triticale, swathing and baling it as hay in June, applying herbicide to prevent regrowth and then planting a multi-species cover crop mixture.

Cover crops are generally planted primarily for soil-health benefits — such as fixing nitrogen, improving soil porosity and boosting soil organic matter — and often offer the farmer no direct commercial benefit. Hall and his colleagues, however, chose to graze their cover crops in the fall, prior to planting another triticale crop, to capture the value of the forage, while also returning nutrients and minerals to the soil through cow manure.

Dual-crop strategy

A mixture of cover crops grows from stubble of previously harvested triticale, produced in a no-till system.

The team showcased the cover crops trial on Sept. 9 during a field day at the research facility.

"Our main objective last year was to demonstrate we could use

cover crops in this area of the state, graze with cattle and get good weight gains," Hall said. "We were also demonstrating fencing systems and what's entailed with grazing cover crops."

Throughout the trial, the experimental field will not be tilled — saving fuel by reducing equipment use, preserving soil carbon that would otherwise be released as greenhouse gases, and maintaining soil structure and living roots essential for soil health.

Hall knows of one area ranch that raises annual forage mixes as cover crops and grazes them, but few, if any, area producers have tried raising and grazing cover crops in the same growing season following a commercial crop, convinced the season would be too short.

Though Hall and his team have yet to calculate their economic returns, they've demonstrated cover crops planted in Salmon can yield significant forage in a short timeframe. In fact, last fall they struggled to keep up with the rapid growth of their cover crop when they grazed 30 yearling heifers across a 29-acre field divided into 15 paddocks, rotating the livestock to a new paddock every two days.

This is a picture from the ongoing trial.

Grazing management

The team used management intensive grazing, setting up temporary electric fences to graze cattle at a high density and short duration to evenly consume forage and distribute manure while minimizing soil compaction. Hall believes grazing cover crops would allow yearling heifers to gain sufficient weight to be ready for sale by early fall, before increasing supply leads to lower prices.

His team will measure yield and forage quality of both the triticale and the cover crops.

"We have a short season, so if we put out a cover crop are we going to have enough time to get benefits as far as cattle growth?" Hall asked. "It looks like we are getting 60 to 70 days of grazing, and sometimes more, before we have to go back in with our other crop."

In the initial year, the team planted several grasses as cover crops, and certain species in that mix produced prussic acid, which is toxic to cattle, following an early season frost.

They had to suspend grazing for about two weeks amid the experiment due to the acid formation, and they've removed plants that could contribute to the same problem from this season's cover crop mix, which includes peas, radishes, turnips, millet, oats, barley and rye.

Soil health and emissions

Gwinyai Chibisa, with the Department of Animal, Veterinary and Food Sciences, will record greenhouse gas emissions from cattle from this season forward, testing whether higher-quality forage from cover crops will contribute to reduced emissions.

Researchers with the Department of Soil and Water Systems have equipment in the field to measure soil carbon accumulation and greenhouse gas emissions from soil.

The first two years of the project were funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Researchers are seeking additional funding for future years of the project. Researchers hope the project will inspire more producers to explore cover crop grazing as a viable strategy for improving soil health and boosting forage production. ■

Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins

A REAL MVP

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Keeping forest roads in shape: Fall maintenance for long-term access

By Audra Cochran
University of Idaho

We often talk about maintaining roadway access to our homes and forests during fire season. Clear, safe roads ensure emergency responders can reach us quickly when disaster strikes. But once the fire season ends, how often do you think about your forest roads?

For instance, what happens when a heavy October rainstorm hits and that small rut in your forest road turns into a gully overnight? Suddenly, your access roads are in disrepair, cutting you off from part of your property until you can get equipment in to repair the damage.

Scenarios like this are all too familiar for private and industrial forest owners in Idaho. With miles of private access roads scattered across forested landscapes, these routes are essential for daily use, wildfire protection, timber management, recreation, and more.

ABOVE: **Reviewing your roadways annually can help you determine the best maintenance plan and schedule.** University of Idaho Extension photo; LEFT: **Installing water bars, rolling dips, or cross-drains on road surfaces can help with drainage control, especially after periods of heavy use such as timber or fire management.** Photo by Randy Brooks

Yet they are also among the most vulnerable parts of any property.

Why road maintenance matters

Forest roads are highly susceptible to damage from weather, erosion, and misuse. Left unchecked, even minor problems can grow quickly into major failures. Neglecting road maintenance can lead to significant expenses and lost access. Poorly maintained roads can:

- Wash sediment into nearby streams and ponds, impacting fish habitat and water quality.
- Block culverts, leading to flooded areas or full washouts.
- Erode to the point of becoming unsafe or impassable.

The cost of repairing these issues can be steep. In some cases, failed road sections require heavy equipment, imported gravel, or complete reconstruction. By contrast, well-kept roads protect your investment.

Simply put, a good road system is an asset, while a neglected one can quickly turn into a liability.

A fall checklist for forest roads

Fall is an ideal time for landowners to prepare their forest roads for winter weather. Before the ground freezes and snow arrives, take time to walk or drive your roads and make sure they are still in proper shape and condition. Look for key spots that may worsen once rain or melting snow arrives.

Key areas to check include:

- Ditches and culverts: Remove leaves, branches, sediment buildup, and other debris from roadside ditches and culverts to ensure no blockages obstruct water flow. Look for signs of rust, crushed pipes, or separation from the roadbed, as these can create sinkholes in your roadways.
- Road surfaces: Smooth ruts and potholes while soils are workable. Add gravel where needed. If you have the proper equipment, crown the road (higher in the center than the edges) to direct water off the surface. Other types of road surfaces include inslope (drains to an inside ditch) or outsloped (drains to the outer edge of roadway). Just be sure the road is functioning as it was designed.
- Drainage control: Water can create issues for roadways. If crowning the entire road is not feasible, install water bars, rolling dips, or cross-drains to safely divert runoff. Make sure existing drainage features are intact and not filled with debris.
- Vegetation management: Trim back encroaching brush and limbs that limit visibility or scrape vehicles. Keep a clear width for pickup trucks, equipment, and fire suppression vehicles.
- Gates and access security: Fall is a good time to check gates, signage, and locks. Consider whether you need barriers to prevent unauthorized ATV or vehicle use that could damage the road during wet conditions.

When building or repairing roads, design them for the intended use. Consider the types of vehicles, products to be hauled, seasons of use, acceptable grades, and limits on stream crossings.

Cost-effective maintenance tips

Keeping forest roads in shape does not have to be expensive. In fact, regular small fixes are far cheaper than waiting for major repairs. A few strategies can help keep costs down:

- Address small problems early: Fixing a rut today is easier and cheaper than repairing a washed-out road section in the spring.
- Work with neighbors: If you share access roads, coordinate maintenance and share the cost of grading, gravel, or culvert replacements.
- Seek assistance: Agencies such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service or the Idaho Department of Lands may offer technical guidance or cost-share programs for erosion control and water quality projects.

Roads as part of stewardship

Road maintenance is not just about convenience, it's about stewardship. Poorly designed or neglected roads can harm streams, fish, and wildlife. A well-maintained road system, on the other hand, supports healthy forests, clean water, and safe access.

In Idaho, the Forest Practices Act (Section 040) establishes rules for construction, reconstruction, and maintenance of forest roads. These standards are designed to minimize erosion and protect water quality, ensuring that road systems remain compatible with healthy ecosystems.

For family forest owners, roads also represent a legacy. A carefully built and maintained forest road system ensures that future generations can continue to access, enjoy, and responsibly manage the property.

Don't forget your roads this fall

As you finish fall projects like firewood cutting, thinning, or other management tasks, do not overlook your roads. Taking just a day to grade surfaces, clear ditches, check culverts, or trim brush can save weeks of frustration and thousands of dollars next spring.

Your forest roads are your lifeline to the land. Keep them in shape, and they'll keep serving you, your family, and your forest for many years to come. ■

(Audra Cochran is an Extension Educator in Clearwater County. She can be reached at audrac@uidaho.edu.)

51% reduction in Snake River quagga mussel impacted area shows progress

Idaho State Department of Agriculture

The Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) announced Sept. 12 a 51% reduction in the quagga mussel impacted area of the Snake River near Twin Falls. Extensive sampling shows the area impacted by quagga mussels is about 3.5 river miles, down from an impact area of 7.2 miles in 2024. The results show significant progress and demonstrate the effectiveness of ISDA's ongoing treatment strategy.

No quagga mussels have been detected upriver or downriver of the 2024 treatment zone. Of concern to irrigators in the Magic Valley, no mussels have been detected in nearby reservoirs.

"Quagga mussels pose a serious threat to Idaho's water infrastructure, ecosystems and economy," ISDA Director Chanel Tewalt said. "Full eradication remains the goal, but even reaching a level of containment is uncommon in other U.S. systems. ISDA's treatments are critical to prevent widespread impacts to agriculture, power generation and Idaho's aquatic environments."

This year, ISDA has conducted over 450 samples in the infested area of the Snake River and more than 4,500 statewide.

Effectively treating the Snake River presents unique challenges because of the river's complexity. Freshwater inputs in 2023 and 2024, along with varying river depths and flow rates have influenced how treatments dissipate to the target species. With an inventory of freshwater inputs and a detailed understanding of river dynamics, ISDA is developing a targeted treatment plan for 2025.

The recent detection has drawn supportive responses from stakeholders and engaged communities across the state. Overall, the responses were clear: ISDA must eradicate the contained infestation of quagga to safeguard the Snake River, which supports hydropower, irrigation, recreation and more.

"A 50% reduction in the quagga mussel impact area is a significant milestone and shows real progress in this fight. At the same time, we know how devastating quagga mussels can be for Idaho agriculture if they are not eradicated. We call on ISDA to do everything necessary to finish the job and reach eradication," said Bryan Searle, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation president.

ISDA is committed to a strategic, science-driven response to fully eradicate this invasive species and protect the state's waterways. Similar to 2023 and 2024, ISDA will make its full treatment plan available to the public. The plan will be shaped by extensive ongoing sampling and careful evaluation of the Snake River's complex flow patterns and site-specific dynamics.

For updates and the treatment plan, visit **idaho.gov/quagga**.

U of I research is raising the bar with caviar

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

Photos by Bill Schaefer

Most Idaho Springs Foods caviar has a distinctive olive color. It also has an exceptionally clean flavor, due largely to producers' access to continuous flows of pristine spring water where sturgeon are raised.

Since the early 1980s, the Lemmon family has specialized in a scarce, niche food product that's synonymous with luxury.

Their Magic Valley-based business, Blind Canyon Aqua Ranch, raises and processes white sturgeon caviar through its subsidiary, Idaho Springs Foods. It's one of two Idaho caviar businesses that have earned the state a reputation for producing the crème de la crème of the precious commodity.

Since 1997, University of Idaho has played a pivotal role in shaping Idaho's renowned caviar industry. Scientists at U of I's Hagerman Fish Culture Experiment Station — part of the Aquaculture Research Institute — have spearheaded innovative studies and delivered vital technical expertise, contributing significantly to the industry's reputation for outstanding quality.

It's all about the water

The secret behind the Magic Valley's caviar lies in producers' access to a continuous flow of pristine spring water, where sturgeon are carefully raised. Caviar — sturgeon eggs cured in salt brine — can develop unappealing flavors when raised in earthen ponds or facilities with recirculating water. Idaho spring water eliminates those impurities, allowing the natural flavor to shine.

"Ours is a very clean flavor so that the buttery and nutty tastes really stand out. You don't have any environmental influence," said Linda Lemmon, general manager of Idaho Springs. "Distributors make certain to note that it's Idaho white sturgeon."

The Lemmons sell their caviar wholesale in large tins, which buyers repackage into smaller tins or jars ranging from a half ounce to 4 ounces each. A single ounce of their product can fetch upward of $100 at retail.

Lemmon's husband Gary is among the principal owners of Blind Canyon. Gary's father, George, started raising Sacramento River white sturgeon in 1982. Five years later, the company joined a newly formed cooperative involving the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Power and about a dozen aspiring commercial sturgeon farmers and other collaborators.

Commercial operators were allowed to breed a few wild sturgeon removed from the Snake River each spring, retaining some of the juvenile fish for caviar and meat production while dedicating others for stocking the catch-and-release fishery. They also agreed to relinquish up to half of their live sturgeon to bolster the fishery in the event of a threat to the wild population.

Sturgeon are remarkably long-lived fish, capable of surviving for over a century. They can also grow to impressive sizes — the largest female in the Lemmons' brood pool, spawned in 1993, now weighs more than 300 pounds.

Idaho produces about 4,400 pounds of caviar annually, placing it a distant second to California among U.S. states. Known for its lighter, olive- and brown-hued roe, often sporting white rings and spots, Idaho's caviar stands in contrast to California's signature black variety.

"Many chefs will tell you the white sturgeon here in Idaho produce some of the most sought-after caviar, particularly in the nation but internationally as well," said Jacob Bledsoe, an assistant professor and aquaculture Extension specialist based in Hagerman.

Caviar harvest typically occurs when fish are between 14 and 16 years old, and processing caviar must happen quickly. They kill the fish, remove the ovaries, salt the eggs and seal them in tins all in under an hour. Cooked sturgeon meat has a dense texture, similar to swordfish, but with a mild flavor.

Annually, Idaho Springs sells about 60,000 pounds of sturgeon meat to Magic Valley fresh fish wholesaler Riverence, which supplies chefs and retailers throughout the country, and another 40,000 pounds to First Ascent Fisheries, which delivers live sturgeon to small grocery stores in the Seattle area. Their filets are also available at local restaurants such as the Turf Club in Twin Falls and Snake River Grill in Hagerman.

Caviar harvested at the ideal moment

Idaho Springs Foods caviar, produced in the Magic Valley, has a reputation for exceptional quality and has benefited from research conducted by scientists with University of Idaho's Hagerman Fish Culture Experiment Station, which is part of the Aquaculture Research Institute.

— just before the fish would deposit the eggs in nature — pops and melts in the mouth, retaining optimal flavor and quality. Harvesting just a day or two late can result in mushy, unusable eggs, wasting about a decade and a half of investment in a fish. The Lemmons use both biopsies and ultrasounds — an approach pioneered by U of I researchers — to monitor egg development.

Partnering with industry to advance sturgeon science

As a member of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Dean's Advisory Board, Lemmon regularly collaborates with U of I scientists. When she has a research question or need, she reaches out to U of I experts, who design studies or draw on scientific literature — including research on other fish species — to provide informed answers.

Because sturgeon are less efficient than rainbow trout at converting feed into body mass — and require several years of feeding — developing cost-effective, species-specific diets is especially important. Researchers at U of I have focused on formulating sturgeon feed using plant-based ingredients and other alternatives to fish meal, which is costly and becoming harder to source due to overfishing.

Their work also emphasizes optimizing nutrition while minimizing fat accumulation in the ovaries of female sturgeon. Eggs from fatty ovaries are harder to harvest, which can hurt caviar quality.

Clayton Mabey, a U of I doctoral student studying aquaculture, recently presented sturgeon dietary research at the World Aquaculture Society Conference in New Orleans, receiving a second-place presentation award. Mabey's research was part of a three-year project funded through the Western Regional Aquaculture Center.

"We found out that sturgeon typically don't need as much protein as rainbow trout or salmon, and they don't need as much fat," said Mabey's advisor, Matt Powell, interim associate dean of research and director of the Idaho Agricultural Experiment Station. "We can use a diet that has a little more carbohydrate to spare the protein."

U of I has also conducted extensive research into sturgeon genetics, disease prevention and methods to preserve and extend caviar's shelf life. The university's work includes refining best practices for egg handling, investigating factors that influence egg color, and studying what affects the proportion of female fish in sturgeon populations.

"The caviar here is typically graded as Grade 1, which is the highest grade you can get, and that's not from the people here in the valley. That's from people coming in from the outside and rating this caviar," Powell said. "That all has to do with the very good diets we feed the sturgeon and the very clean water they live in." ■

Photo by Heather Smith Thomas

Members of the Christensen family are shown on their farm near Grace.

BKR Farms: A fifth-generation farm near Grace

By Heather Smith Thomas
For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Ryan Christensen is fifth generation on the family farm near Grace.

"Our great-great-grandfather cleared off sagebrush for the original homestead in 1889," says Ryan. "I grew up on the farm."

Ryan graduated from Brigham Young University in landscape management, with a minor in business management. He met Andrea Smith at BYU and they married and now have 4 children.

"While in college I realized the farm was where I wanted to be," he says.

When Ryan joined the operation in 2009, BKR Farms, LLC was formed (BKR stands for Bart—their father—Kyle and his brother Ryan). In recent years their dad has become more retired and it's mainly Kyle and Ryan doing the farming.

The farm today grows a variety of crops. It has produced many different crops in the past 136 years, but the staple from the beginning was wheat.

In 1975 Ryan's father added seed potatoes to the rotation of wheat and barley. What started with 80 acres of a single variety of seed potatoes has now grown into a large seed potato operation with 13 different varieties.

Today the seed potatoes include varieties that will become potato chips, French fries, baked potatoes, dehydrated potatoes, etc.

"We now work with a retiring potato farmer to expand our varieties, including more of the processed varieties," Ryan says.

Most of the farm's seed potatoes go to Washington, Idaho and Texas but have been sent as far as New Jersey, Pennsylvania, California, and Ontario, Canada.

In 2010, oats were added to the crop rotation. BKR Farms also began using cover crops and no-till farming, and in 2020 added organic hard red wheat, mustard, flax, and some experimental wheat varieties.

More recently the farm has also grown safflower, seed barley, and triticale and now has about 3,500 acres in planned rotation systems.

The farm no longer has any fallow ground. This reduces erosion problems and increases water retention.

"By diversifying, we've been able to remain productive and get a crop every year, rather than having a field go fallow for a year," says Ryan.

This helps with water retention; the potato crop requires less water the following year, says Ryan. He has seen 20 to 30% reduction in water needed, due to rotation of cover crops, which he says also adds nutrients and breaks up any compaction of soil that occurred over the former two years with the cereal crop and keeps the soil healthier.

The farm's dryland acres are 100% no-till and the irrigated ground is 75% no-till.

"We can't do no-till potatoes so after two or three years of no-till, I use a cover crop to break up the ground and make it healthier and ready for the potatoes," Ryan says. "This makes a better crop of potatoes."

Various crops from the farm are marketed in different ways. Mustard is sold to Mountain Seeds Oils in American Falls. Triticale and oats go to a local seed company.

"I partnered with Thomas Ag to start a forage seed company to grow triticale, oats, and peas," Ryan says. "We can clean the seed for local farmers so they don't have to go a long ways to get their seed for cover crops and forage mixes."

He says it helps to have multiple crops "because on any given year something will usually have a good market."

Ryan says he and his brother work well together and try to be innovative.

"We use many different technologies to keep up with the times so we can manage our costs better," he says.

They are currently doing research trials with BYU in Provo, and Utah State University, working on some new projects with less expensive moisture sensors.

"It's fun to be able to work with your kids, especially when they have an interest in what you are doing. There's no better place to raise children than a farm or ranch in today's world."

– Ryan Christensen, BKR Farms

"We put more of these in the field and they communicate with the pivots to control water flow," Ryan says.

The farm has three full-time employees year-round and also utilizes the federal H-2A agricultural guestworker program to bring in foreign workers during the busiest seasons.

There is another generation coming on.

Ryan's oldest daughter, Ava, is 16 and drives one of the farm's potato-harvesting tractors. This will be her fourth year running a tractor in the field. His second daughter, Lila, and his son, Lincoln, work in the potato storages during harvest.

"My youngest daughter, Claire, is still quite young but comes out and rides with me when she can, and my wife works with me on the farm," says Ryan.

"My son is only 11 but he loves farming," he adds. "He loves to ride with the truck drivers during harvest and knows more about the whole operation than the drivers who have been working for me several years.

This year he also helped shovel the dirt that falls on the ground at the cellars. That's the job I started out with when I was his age."

"It's fun to be able to work with your kids, especially when they have an interest in what you are doing," Ryan says. "There's no better place to raise children than a farm or ranch in today's world."

Right now, his oldest daughter doesn't have an interest in coming back to the farm, "but she tells Lincoln that if he is not coming back, she will come back and run it," Ryan says. "She wants to make sure I will always have help."

Ryan will take part in the Potato Leadership Institute this year, which includes 10 days of education and training seminars and will be in Madison, Wisconsin for the first five days and Washington, D.C., for the second five days.

The purpose of the institute is to teach people how to be a leader in the potato industry. ■

Number of farmers & ranchers serving in legislature declining

By Paige Nelson
For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

As the general population becomes further removed from agriculture, so do policymakers.

Are your state representatives farmers or ranchers? Does your state senator come from a career in ag? Does anyone from your legislative district even have ties to production agriculture?

Doug Jones, a state representative from 1985-2005, counts around 20 members of both houses of the 2025 Idaho Legislature as agriculturalists. Braden Jensen, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation director of governmental affairs, puts that number at 18, adding that a few of the freshmen legislators have family who farm. Still, they are not directly tied to the operation.

That means roughly 20% of Idaho's current legislature hails from production agriculture. To put it in perspective, farmers and ranchers represent less than 2% of the U.S. population, so having almost a quarter of our state's legislative branch and the governor and lieutenant governor considered active in agriculture is quite remarkable.

However, the number of House and Senate seats filled by an elected farmer or rancher is on a shocking decline in a state that prides itself on having agriculture as its backbone and allied ag industries make up many of its appendages.

Photo by Sean Ellis

In the 2025 legislative session, farmers and ranchers made up roughly 20% of the Idaho legislative branch. According to a list compiled by Food Producers of Idaho, that number is down 4% from 2017.

Unwilling or unable?

Has agriculture turned its back on politics? Heaven's no, says Jones.

"Every time you have a reapportionment, you get more urban seats, particularly in the Treasure Valley. There are districts completely within city limits," he says. "Farmers, in general, are very public-spirited. They will be on the school board, the fire district board, the cemetery district, or whatever because that's part of what they believe in — being a part of their community."

While farmers and ranchers are generally very giving of their increasingly limited time, Jones does see more problems with getting agriculturalists elected due to the time and money required, the viciousness of political campaigns and the out-of-state money coming in.

"It's a bigger challenge than it used to be by far," he claims.

When Jones was first elected to the House in 1985, he says, 50% of the legislature represented agriculture. During the past 40 years, agriculture has lost 30% of its representation. Jones says this isn't unique to Idaho, noting that every state in the nation faces similar issues but on an even larger scale.

Chanel Tewalt, director of the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, grew up in eastern Oregon. She says she never dreamed of working in government because, growing up, she felt that policymakers in Salem didn't care about her, her family's farming operation or even her side of the state.

Rep. Jerald Raymond, District 31 House Seat A, serves as vice chair of the House Agriculture Affairs Committee and is a member of the Revenue and Taxation and Resource Conservation Committees, three areas directly impacting agriculture. Raymond, a rancher from Rigby, says that 25% - 30% of the Revenue and Taxation and Resource Conservation members have

agricultural backgrounds. Of the agriculture committee, only half are tied to ag.

Jones, who today works as a lobbyist for Idaho Water Engineering and interacts with legislators in Idaho, Washington, Oregon and Hawaii, says legislators who don't understand agriculture are often willing to learn, but they can have ideologies that slow progress or even stop progress altogether.

For example, Raymond cites a recent Idaho State Brand Board request to raise livestock inspection fees. The board needed the fee increase to function, support its employees, buy four-wheel-drive vehicles, etc.

According to Jones, brand inspections are legally mandatory in Idaho for selling livestock. Fees are paid by the livestock owner and go into a dedicated fund for this purpose. Livestock inspection protects both the buyer and the seller of the animals.

"We had a member of the [ag] committee that said, 'A fee is a tax, and a tax raise is not going to fly, so I'm not voting for it,'" says Raymond. "His rationale was [the increased rate will be] passed onto the consumer. It was a 30-minute discussion on how that's not realistic … just because we paid $300 to have our animals inspected does not mean we'll get $300 more when they go on the truck. He was adamant he was not going to vote for it."

The livestock industry and Food Producers of Idaho supported the inspection rate request legislation.

The brand bill ended up passing the House 44-22.

Cultivating legislative connections

While the brand board is one thing, there's another elephant in the room regarding whether agriculture is understood: Water. Water issues in the state of Idaho aren't going away.

You don't explain Idaho water law and issues and options in the future to someone in one day, says Jones. "It takes a lot of time."

But you do have to start somewhere. Jones says that start could look like finding out who your legislators are. Next, invite them to lunch or for a ride in the tractor with you during harvest, take them on a farm tour, etc.

"Sit down and get acquainted with them because that does two things," he says. "You learn more about them. They learn about you, and if there's a particular issue that comes up, if you call them and they've already met you, they're much more apt to return your call or respond to your email."

Raymond says the legislature goes on organized tours throughout the state. They visit northern Idaho once a year and go on a water tour every other year, but he cannot recall ever going on an ag tour as a legislative body. He says an ag tour is greatly needed.

"Some people have never been to a livestock auction. Some people have never been to a vet clinic outside of small animals," he says. "They've never been on a ranch when you're shipping cattle and need a brand inspector to be there, and he needs to be driving a four-wheel-drive pickup because he's not going to make it there in a two-wheel-drive."

This problem isn't going away, says Jones. But the ag industry can always get better in its approach with legislators, and it must get better because our livelihoods depend on it, he adds.

Visit legislature.idaho.gov to meet your representatives and grow your relationships with them. ■

Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins

"He always over-salts."

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Episode 91 - Oasis Camel Dairy

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