Idaho Farm Bureau
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Connecting *Consumers* To *Agriculture*

The Zipline

By Zippy Duvall
President, American Farm Bureau Federation

The power of our grassroots

One of the great honors of my role as American Farm Bureau president is sharing the stories of farmers and ranchers from across this country with leaders who are making decisions that directly impact our work, our families, and our livelihoods.

From lawmakers on Capitol Hill all the way to the White House, I am humbled to sit across from powerful leaders to help them understand how you grow the food, fiber, and renewable fuel our nation and the world depends on.

And I have that seat because of you, because they want to hear your stories. Like all Americans, our nation's leaders, including the president of the United States, want to understand where their food comes from.

Recently, I had the privilege of sitting down for a direct conversation with President Trump in the Oval Office. We had a full discussion about the pressing issues impacting your families, your farms, and the farm economy.

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The President's Desk

By Bryan Searle
President, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Farmers need to tell their story

How many times have you asked yourself, why did this legislation pass or not pass into law, within the state or nationally?

Or maybe you even wondered, when did this become law?

Though it may seem a bit overwhelming to get involved, you may wonder, how can I or how do I get involved?

As we think about the low percentage of our population who even vote, this leaves it to a minority to be involved and engaged with the public.

The front-page story in this month's magazine is centered around a call for farmers and ranchers to share their stories with a public that is hungry for reliable information about how their food is produced.

As fortune would have it, this magazine is sent out to both farmers and ranchers and a good number of Idahoans who have no link to agriculture.

Many, if not most, of the people not involved in agriculture who get this magazine are among

See **SEARLE,** page 6

Inside Farm Bureau

By Zak Miller
CEO, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Yee-Haw

When my daughters were young, they'd beg to help work cattle, as long as it was on horseback. I was always happy to oblige.

But as excited as they were about horses and cattle, reality didn't always match the idea. The great outdoors doesn't take reservations. A day in the saddle could be cold, wet, hot, dusty, long, and full of surprises.

When my girls' endurance ended before the work did, there was little to be done besides keeping going until the ride ended.

When complaints, tears, and cold toes started and the end of the trail was hours away, I'd help them remember: they aren't just girls, they're Cowgirls. Cowgirls say Yee-Haw!

This didn't change the conditions, but it became our family's way of saying, "We can do this," and remembering we chose to be out there.

I admit, I often Yee-Haw to remind myself I can do it, too.

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COVER: Idaho rancher and online influencer Jessie Jarvis urges farmers to tell their stories to people outside of agriculture. See story on page 8. Photo by Nicole Poyo Brennan, Bruneau, Idaho

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Potato Days will try to set two world records

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

MERIDIAN – Participants at this year's Potato Days festival in Meridian will have a chance to witness, or be part of, two world records.

Organizers believe they will almost assuredly succeed in one of their world record attempts: most baked potatoes served in a single day at one place.

That record was set in Peru and sits at more than 3,200 potatoes and Potato Days organizer Thomas Watson says it should be the easiest of the event's two world record attempts.

"Last year, we served over 11,000 people meals, so that's going to be the easier one to break," he says.

The other record attempt is the largest potato sack race, which is currently at 2,095 people and was set in the Netherlands.

"Let's bring some of these records to Idaho," Watson says. "It would be fun for the potato state to own the Guiness world records relating to potatoes."

The 2025 festival, which will take place from Sept. 19-21, will draw an estimated 25,000 people this year to Kleiner Memorial Park, across from The Village in Meridian.

Watson and fellow organizers started the festival in 2023 when they did an online search and realized there were no potato-themed celebrations in the Boise area.

In Shelley in East Idaho, thousands of people celebrate the potato every year, an event that literally the entire city and more turns out for.

Shelley is the epicenter of potato production in Idaho, and the United States, and it makes sense for the people who live in that area to celebrate it. Heck, the mascot for Shelley High School is the Russet.

Watson said he wanted to see the same type of enthusiasm for the potato in the Treasure Valley of southwestern Idaho, the state's largest urban center by far.

"We're creating these potato ambassadors everywhere they go because they're pretty darn proud of their state and its connection with potatoes."

– Jamey Higham, Idaho Potato Commission CEO

Idaho leads the nation in total potato production and the state's farmers produce about 14 billion pounds of spuds each year.

The potato, the product that Idaho is most known for, brings in billions of dollars in economic activity to the state each year and that impact extends beyond just East Idaho.

"We want people in the city to recognize and appreciate the farmer the way people in rural Idaho do," says Watson, director of Idaho Business Alliance, which organizes Potato Days.

He says organizers have been pleasantly surprised by turnout for the event.

They were hoping between 1,000 and 3,000 people would show up during the event's inaugural year, but when thousands of people began flowing into Kleiner Park from every direction that first year, they knew they were on to something special.

"The easiest thing that we've ever had to advertise is Potato Days," Watson says. "People flock to the event because of what it is and what it represents. And it doesn't have to do with probably anything other than it's Potato Days and we live in Idaho and we should go to Potato Days."

The Potato Days event is supported by the Idaho Potato Commission, which donates the free schwag that is handed out during the event. Among the prizes are pallets of potato-themed toys, stickers, coloring and recipe books, photo books and replicas of the Big Idaho Potato Truck.

Photo by Sean Ellis

Thousands of potato-themed toys, such as Spuddy Buddy mascots, are handed out during Potato Days in Meridian. The annual event has become a massive celebration of the Idaho spud.

And thousands of Spuddy Buddies, the stuffed IPC mascot that has turned out to be a very hot item at Potato Days.

"It's shocking to see how badly these kids want Spuddy Buddy," Watson says. "They really want Spuddy Buddy."

Idaho Potato Commission CEO Jamey Higham says the IPC supports Potato Days for the same reason it sponsors other potato-related events in Idaho, such as

the Famous Idaho Potato Bowl and Idaho Potato Marathon.

"We're creating these potato ambassadors everywhere they go because they're pretty darn proud of their state and its connection with potatoes," he says.

Higham says it is nice to see the city folk in Idaho get so excited about the potato.

"There was a time 25 or 30 years ago when (some) people in Idaho were trying to disassociate themselves from the potato industry and now I feel like it's kind of cool to be supportive of the industry," he says. "I think it's a great thing that the Boise area is celebrating the spud like this."

This year's Potato Days event is being sponsored by county Farm Bureau organizations in the Treasure Valley area.

"We're really happy to see a major event right here in Idaho's main population center celebrating the Idaho potato and agriculture," said Ada County Farm Bureau President Neil Durrant, who farms in the Meridian-Kuna area. "Ada County Farm Bureau board members are excited about this event and were happy to help support it."

This year's festival will have a lot more potato meals than the first two. Gone will be the dozens of food trucks that were theoretically supposed to incorporate potatoes into at least one of their meals.

Potato Days organizers, supported by volunteers, will instead cook all of the food and it will all be potato-based and loaded with toppings.

"We're doing months and months of food preparation and figuring out how to serve people quickly, how to get people through a line in 60 to 120 seconds each," Watson says.

Organizers invested in a large commercial kitchen to achieve this.

"It's taken us almost an entire year just to reinvent the food at Potato Days," Watson says. "It's been a difficult task, but we're finally there."

At last year's event, thousands of potato-based meals were served, but about 10,000 served meals were not potato-based.

"The No. 1 thing we hear from people after the event is that they want more potatoes," Watson says.

"Most people, when they hear about Potato Days, their brain immediately goes to food," he says. "You are expecting a lot of potato-based items at reasonable prices, so that's really what we want to deliver on."

"We want all of the meals to have something to do with potatoes directly," he adds. "Not a side dish, but the actual meal."

Potato Days is partnering with some local chefs to help run the food operation and the Idaho Potato Commission has offered advice on how to best prepare the various potato dishes.

Watson knows he will end up helping with the food preparation at some point during the festival.

"I will absolutely end up in the kitchen with an apron on," he laughs.

As usual, Potato Days will be filled with dozens of different potato games and other events, such as a sidewalk chalk art contest, all centering around the spud.

There will also be plenty of bouncy castles and other attractions to keep the kids busy, such as a bubble garden.

Watson said it's not known for now what the crowd limit for the event can or should be, and organizers are focused on keeping it a free, fun family-friendly event centered around celebrating the state's humble but important potato.

If organizers remain focused on perfecting the experience, the growth of the event will take care of itself, he says.

"We really see Potato Days as a family tradition and we are looking for ways to make it a bigger, better family tradition every year," he says. "I like the idea that we're delivering a free, fun family experience and that families can count on it now every September." ■

DUVALL

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He asked me a lot of questions about farming, which gave me the opportunity to explain the science behind our farming practices and the tools that we use.

Thanks to your grassroots efforts, our nation's leaders are seeing that what matters to agriculture should matter to all Americans.

I expressed Farm Bureau's appreciation to President Trump and his administration for the agriculture and tax provisions in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

I shared with the President how this year's crop is the most expensive we have ever put in the ground, and that this law is bringing much-needed relief with increases to outdated reference prices and funding for other risk management tools. But I also emphasized that it's time to finish the job with an updated farm bill to address other programs and policy improvements that are important to farmers and ranchers.

As you might have guessed, we also discussed trade. I shared that farmers are eager to follow the success of the administration's new deal with the U.K. with even more trade deals to open up markets across the globe.

America's farmers and ranchers are growing some of the best products in the world, safely and sustainably, as I shared with the president, and we're long overdue for a level playing field in countries that have thrown up non-scientific barriers to American-grown products.

The president assured me that boosting U.S. agriculture would remain a priority in negotiating new deals.

The president and I discussed other challenges and concerns weighing on farm families right now. I emphasized that labor is the greatest limiting factor to U.S. agriculture.

If we want to boost American-grown products, we need to reform our H-2A guestworker program.

I shared with him the personal stories that I have heard from farmers on these challenges: how you cannot afford the dramatic hikes in the H-2A wage rate and how farmers, despite extensive efforts, have been unsuccessful in recruiting domestic workers to fill these essential roles.

We also discussed the important role pesticides play on the farm, both in protecting our ability to produce a crop and in promoting regenerative practices on the farm.

What's more, I underscored to the president that most farmers live on the land where they use these products, so safety is of the utmost importance for our families and the families we're growing food for.

Words can't fully express what an honor this was to speak directly with the president and share stories from Farm Bureau members.

I was also grateful to be joined by Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins and Secretary of Labor Lori Chavez-DeRemer. They have both been strong advocates for farmers and ranchers in their roles in the administration.

Secretary Rollins also joined us the next day as the keynote speaker at the American Farm Bureau's Council of Presidents meeting.

Every summer we gather all Farm Bureau presidents from the 50 state and Puerto Rico Farm Bureaus, as well as our national committee chairs, to hear from leaders and lawmakers.

This year, our policy team at AFBF worked directly with the White House to hold our meeting at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building's Indian Treaty Room. This was the largest gathering of our state presidents at the White House ever.

We heard updates from cabinet members, including Secretary Rollins and EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin, other administration officials, and senior White House staff.

Each meeting, every conversation, not only last week but across my time in Washington, reminds me of the power of our great federation. The American Farm Bureau, your American Farm Bureau, is the united Voice of Agriculture because of grassroots members who are committed to their farms, their families and their communities.

We know that our nation is stronger when agriculture succeeds. And thanks to the tireless work across our federation, from volunteers at the local county Farm Bureau to our dedicated staff to our state and national leaders, your voice is being heard from the local chamber of commerce all the way to the White House. ■

SEARLE

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host of consumers who truly want to understand farming and hear from the men and women who farm and ranch.

Recently, I was in Washington, D.C., attending board meetings and other meetings with American Farm Bureau.

Each year in July, all the presidents from each of the states come together in a Council of Presidents.

This year was by far one of the best meetings, as we had cabinet members address us. We were invited into the Eisenhower Executive building at the White House, where members of the administration came into the meeting and addressed us.

These included USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins. One of her repeated comments was about farmers and ranchers needing to tell their story better.

We also heard from a U.S trade representative addressing tariffs and the mess our country has allowed to happen over many years. He described it like this: "It's like unscrambling eggs that were scrambled 50 years ago."

Again, we were invited by this trade representative to tell our

story of how the impact of a lack of trade is causing agriculture markets to be at levels well below production costs and about the many farmers who are being pushed out of business.

We heard from EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin, who also asked us to tell our story about how there has been such a lost focus of who and what EPA is and should be doing.

Just a few of us got in to see the Secretary of Labor, Lori Chavez-DeRemer, and voice our concerns with the current labor shortage and the fact that there is no year-round guest worker program and the seasonal guest worker program that we have is very complicated and challenging.

So why do I share this? Because what we experienced was individuals with common sense asking for us to engage more in telling the stories we experience each day.

Let's talk about ways you can be involved.

First, always vote and become familiar with those who are going to enact laws that affect each of us. Second, never be afraid to contact, by email, in person, or by phone, those who are elected and share your real-life experiences with them.

Hold them accountable to representing the people, not their own personal beliefs.

We live in a day of instant messaging with social media where we can help educate the general public about farming by posting the things we do to provide food and fiber.

To the farmers and ranchers, I will say this: Everyone, and I mean everyone, needs to hear your story. That includes the general public, as well as elected officials and the heads of agencies, both local, state and federal.

People today in general don't have a real understanding of the realities of what it takes to not only produce food, but also what it entails to get it to their plate.

They have questions and if you don't answer them, someone else will and their answers might not be correct.

And remember, what might seem to be a mundane part of your daily farming life might be incredibly interesting to someone who doesn't live on a farm and they might want to know more about it. Tell them.

Also, you don't have to a showman or great with words to tell people about agriculture. You can start by telling your neighbors, your fellow PTA members or the people in your church group.

To people not involved in agriculture, I will say this: A tiny percentage – less than 2% – of Americans farm and ranch today. There's no shame in not understanding the industry.

You are not involved in it. We understand that. I don't know anything about aeronautic engineering or surgery.

If you have a question about farming or your food, ask it. It's your food. You're paying for it and it's going in your body. You have a right to know everything about it and how it's produced.

The bottom line is this: there are a smaller and smaller number of people on one side – farmers – and a horde of people on the other side who want to hear from them and ask them questions.

So … let's get to it. ■

MILLER

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Because I'm not heartless and my girls have grandparents, uncles, aunts, and friends of solid gold, whenever they started to Yee-Haw, extra gloves, coats, jokes, and encouragement magically flowed their way.

I love the agricultural lifestyle because, independent as it is, very few truly work entirely alone.

But some days, Yee-Haw isn't enough. There are times when circumstances and resources aren't sufficient for the job. Those days are rare, but they happen. That's when extra effort is needed.

Currently, many in ag country need more than just a strong Yee-Haw. Nearly all crops grown in Idaho are experiencing prices near or below production costs.

Farmers never set their selling price—they're bound by market demands. Additionally, they participate in one of the most regulated industries in America, with many decisions dictated by those who often lack a proper understanding of agriculture.

Farmers and ranchers are tough, innovative, humble, and independent. They ask for very little and know how to Yee-Haw through countless challenges.

They also need help from all Idahoans and Americans. Here's what we can do:

Trust them. They care for their animals, soil, and environment. Listen to them before deciding if their practices are safe or harmful. We don't need blind trust, but we shouldn't act without hearing from farmers and ranchers first.

Assume positive intent. Modern agriculture looks different from what it used to, but that doesn't mean it's bad or corrupt. Agriculture is highly regulated from top to bottom.

Don't jump to conclusions when you hear extreme claims about farming practices, employment protocols, environmental stewardship, or food safety. Problems can happen, but they're far more often accidental than intentional.

Support empowerment, not more control. Some leaders want to save farmers from themselves through more laws and regulations. While we all benefit from reasonable basic regulations, urban ideologists may not be best equipped to understand farm country needs.

Before saving agriculture through control, let's improve it through empowerment.

Idaho is one of the biggest agricultural states in the country. After over 20 years of population growth, most Idahoans still value our agricultural foundation.

Our farmers and ranchers will keep Yee-Haw-ing through their challenges. Hopefully, the rest of us will support them as they work to feed us. ■

"There are no secrets we can't share. Nobody's stopping us. Nobody's limiting us."

– Jessie Jarvis

Rancher-influencer encourages farmers to share their stories with the public

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

KING HILL – People will get their information about farming and ranching from somewhere or somebody, so it might as well come from real farmers and ranchers.

That's one of the messages that rancher and online influencer Jessie Jarvis shared with Idaho Farm Bureau Federation members during the group's annual meeting last December.

"Who is the PR firm for agriculture? It is me and you," she told IFBF members, who are farmers and ranchers themselves.

She expounded upon that message during a recent interview at the family ranch.

Jarvis is a third-generation rancher who lives and

LEFT: **Jessie Jarvis at her family ranch.** ABOVE: **Jessie Jarvis and her family – husband Justin and children Jhett and Jaxyn – at their ranch in King Hill.** Photos by Nicole Poyo Brennan

ranches in the King Hill area east of Mountain Home.

The family ranch raises black angus and red angus cattle and also grows alfalfa hay and silage corn. It includes a small feedlot.

"Our ranch is the heart of who I am, and the reason behind why I am so very passionate about agriculture," she said.

One of the things she is most passionate about is connecting with consumers who want to know more about farming and the people who produce their food.

She encouraged other farmers and ranchers to join her in telling their story to a public hungry for real information about agriculture.

Jarvis grew up on the family ranching operation, then headed to the College of Idaho to pursue a business degree.

She got the opportunity to develop her print and digital communication skills while working as the communications director for the Idaho Cattle Association for two years.

She returned to the ranch in 2013 and now is married with two kids. She has juggled her ranch work with writing freelance articles for ag and western publications.

She has also made it a major focus to connect with consumers. She doesn't like the word "influencer," but in reality, she has become one – she has more than 50,000 online followers – interacting with consumers and sharing her own story online.

Jarvis said she was pleasantly surprised by a nationwide Gallup poll in 2024 that showed the American public trusts the farming and agriculture sector more than any other industry in the country.

However, she added, the ag industry can't assume that positive feeling will always be there, and it's up to farmers and ranchers themselves to do their part to ensure people continue to trust their industry.

"We can't stay stagnant in not continuing to share what we're doing and have those one-on-one conversations with people," she said.

She credits her honesty about the joys and frustrations of ranch life with garnering 56,000 followers online. When wildfires damaged their range, the family debated selling their cattle or using virtual fencing, choosing the latter.

Jarvis encourages agricultural producers to really ask the questions of why people feel the way they do, as opposed to "thinking we know what consumers want to know about ag."

"That's why creating a true conversation is so vital," she said.

It's easy to find inaccurate or wrong information about farming online, Jarvis said.

"That's why I think being a trusted voice in your industry is so important," she said. "Because you are then that person that people can go to for information instead of going to Google."

That same Gallup poll that showed

"We need to do a better job telling our story so that future generations value and support the work that farmers do every day."

– Jessie Jarvis

the public's trust in farming is high also showed that 54 percent of Americans ages 11-24 have never seen a cow in real life.

"That is absolutely wild," Jarvis said. "I think that goes to show how important it is for us to continue to showcase and highlight our lives to (the public)."

The good thing about sharing the true story of agriculture is that farmers and ranchers have nothing to hide, she said.

"Why do we rank so high in that poll? Because we have nothing to hide," she said. "There are no secrets we can't share. Nobody's stopping us. Nobody's limiting us."

Jarvis said one of the reasons it's so important for agriculture to be on the offensive when it comes to sharing its story is because, otherwise, it will always be on the defensive.

"When we allow other people to tell our story, then we have to go in and play defense," she said. "That's why I think we need to continue to be focused on sharing our story. That is us playing offense; we get to be in the driver's seat telling our story."

In December, while speaking to IFBF members as one of the conference's keynote speakers, Jarvis admitted she was wildly uncomfortable but doing it anyway. She encouraged other farmers to think the same way.

"Maybe we don't necessarily want to engage, but if we don't do it, who else is going to do it?" she asked.

"You don't have to get on a big stage in order to share your story," she added recently. "You can do it in a one-on-one setting or with your church group or with your PTA or your fellow T-ball moms. Every voice in our industry is so important and needs to be shared and to be heard."

"So, it does take every single one of us to move the needle and make a difference," she said. "We need everybody."

Jarvis also reminded farmers and ranchers that their operation is unique and people outside of the agriculture world really want to know about it.

"It is as unique as your fingerprint," she said. "Nobody else does it the way that you do it and that is the case for every single farm and every single ranch that exists in America today. So, you have a unique story to tell."

Samantha Parrott, executive director of the Snake River Sugarbeet Growers Association, agrees with Jarvis' take on how vital it is to make sure the public hears the real story about agriculture from real farmers and ranchers.

Farmers make up less than 2 percent of the population now and most people today grow up not truly understanding where their food comes from, she said.

"Our industry is complex and the challenges we face, from environmental regulations to economic pressures, aren't always visible to the public," Parrott said. "That's why educating people about agriculture is so important."

"Agriculture isn't just a way of life; it's the backbone of Idaho's economy," Parrott added. "We need to do a better job telling our story so that future generations value and support the work that farmers do every day."

Andi Woolf-Weibye, executive director of the Idaho Bean Commission, said the IBC board has recently been talking specifically about how important it is to tell agriculture's story.

"We … all need to get together and start telling the story, somehow, and educate more people," she said. "If we don't tell our story, somebody else will and they might not have the agriculture industry's best interests in mind." ■

(Freelance writer Dianna Troyer contributed to this article.)

Jessie Jarvis with her husband, Justin.

Idaho Farm Bureau's Podcast: Dirt Road Discussions

By Kristy Lindauer
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – Listeners might come for the ag, but they stay for the stories.

Hosted by Cam Hammond and Ott Clark and produced by the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation, the Dirt Road Discussions podcast is built around a simple but powerful concept – "All about agriculture, all the time."

With 88 episodes published and more than 33,000 downloads, this podcast obviously keeps listeners engaged.

But that tagline only hints at the range of content waiting in each episode.

At first glance, it might sound like a traditional farm podcast. But listen in, and you'll quickly realize this is something else entirely.

Dirt Road Discussions blends storytelling, technology, and personality into a format that both informs and entertains. Take the episode "Parachuting Beavers," which unpacks the unbelievable history of wildlife relocation in Idaho.

Or "Dances with Wolves and Grizzlies," a conversation that steps into the wild to explore predator management and human-wildlife conflict with raw honesty. In "Drones: The Tractors of the Sky," Cam and Ott take a hard look at the cutting edge of agricultural technology.

Each episode dives into topics that matter in the ag world, but not always in the ways listeners might expect.

Whether it's a story about wildlife being parachuted into Idaho wilderness, a look at the rising popularity of miniature livestock, or a serious conversation about the role of drones in modern farming, Cam and Ott keep things real, relevant, humorous and often surprising.

The hosts' chemistry is part of the magic. Cam brings a down-to-earth curiosity that makes each guest feel like a neighbor. Ott adds a dose of humor and insight drawn from a lifetime of agricultural experience.

Together, they invite listeners into conversations that are both informative and personal. Episodes often feel less like interviews and more like sitting around a table or in the truck headed down a dirt road.

Cam Hammond, left, and Ott Clark are the hosts of Dirt Road Discussions.

What truly sets Dirt Road Discussions apart is its commitment to highlighting the humans behind the headlines.

Whether it's a rancher rethinking conservation, a scientist pushing the limits of technology, or a rural youth advocating for the future of family farms, the podcast puts voices to the people changing the landscape of agriculture.

In every episode, there's an underlying respect for the land, for the work, and for the people who do it.

For readers looking to explore agriculture through stories that go deeper, Dirt Road Discussions is more than a podcast. Listen, download, and subscribe wherever podcasts are found and we will see you down the road. ■

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

Let's find the perfect fit for you.
Contact your Farm Bureau agent to get started.

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Photo by Sean Ellis

Potatoes in the field are ready to be harvested in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo. On July 2, the first field was released from the Idaho PCN quarantine program.

First-ever Idaho spud field released from PCN program

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

SHELLEY – It took a lot of time, toil and tears, but it's finally happened: the first field has been released from the Idaho PCN quarantine program.

USDA announced July 2 that it has deregulated a 120-acre field near Shelley from the state's pale cyst nematode program.

The announcement came as welcome news to the handful of Idaho potato growers who have had their fields included in the PCN quarantine since 2006, when pale cyst nematode was first discovered in a field near Shelley.

"The fact that we had a field … taken out of the quarantine is a huge deal for our industry and shows that things are moving in the right direction," said Idaho Potato Commission CEO Jamey Higham.

A serious invasive pest in potatoes, PCN is a tiny roundworm that feeds off potato plant roots and can cause major yield loss. It is considered a quarantine pest by close to 80 nations.

It is not a human health threat.

To date, it is not known how it made its way to Idaho or when it first appeared here.

"Do we have the exact solution? I hope so. We're hopeful that this solution also works in other growers' fields and they can be released from the program as well."

– Bryan Searle, IFBF President

The released field is owned by Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President Bryan Searle, a Shelley area potato farmer.

"This is historic, in my opinion," he said about the first release of a field from the PCN program. "It's quite a deal."

When PCN was first detected in Idaho, USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service set up a PCN quarantine around an 8.5-mile radius in southeast Idaho to prevent its spread.

The federal agency said the quarantine program was necessary to convince trading partners who closed their door to Idaho or U.S. potato exports following the discovery to reopen their borders to U.S. spuds.

Growers in the quarantine zone set up by APHIS face strict testing and phytosanitary requirements.

A total of 6,315 acres are regulated under the PCN program, including 3,420 acres that are considered infested and 2,895 acres that are regulated due to associations with infested fields.

A decade ago, Searle led a group of East Idaho farmers to Boise to plead with state legislators for help from some of what they said were overburdensome and unwarranted quarantine zone regulations.

A group of 15 potato farmers affected by the quarantine filed a federal lawsuit in 2015 that claimed USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service developed the PCN quarantine program without the proper public notice or input.

District Court Judge Edward Lodge agreed that APHIS violated the rulemaking requirements of the Administrative Procedure Act.

But he declined to vacate the quarantine program and its regulations, saying that could seriously disrupt and harm the state and country's potato industry.

"The consequences that would likely result from vacating or enjoining the (PCN quarantine program) will have significant immediate and long-term consequences to both the state of Idaho as well as the United States as a whole," Lodge wrote.

Now, 19 years after Idaho's PCN program and quarantine zone were put in place, the first field has been released from it.

To be released from the program, a field must pass a series of tests to ensure PCN has been eradicated from the soil.

"It's been 13 years since the field was confirmed to be infested with PCN. Since then, the field has been subject to strict cleaning and sanitation practices … and restrictions regarding growing PCN-host plants," Acting APHIS Deputy Administrator Matt Rhoads said in a news release. "We are excited to release this field from regulation and want to the thank the field owners for their perseverance and diligence in achieving this significant milestone."

It hasn't been easy and the journey has been a long and difficult one, but there is now light at the end of the tunnel, Searle said. He hopes the same protocols that were used to help his field be the first to exit the program can be applied to other fields that remain in the quarantine.

Searle said this solution was accomplished by working with outside sources and trying a variety of products and approaches.

"Do we have the exact solution? I hope so," he said. "We're hopeful that this solution also works in other growers' fields and they can be released from the program as well."

Searle said the achievement was the result of a lot of good minds working together to finally come up with a viable solution.

He said research done by University of Idaho scientists was a big help and he also credited the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, his long-time crop consultant – Gary Farmer – and others.

"Kudos to all the brilliant minds that worked together on this and made it happen," he said. "We thought outside the box and looked for all kinds of options. Ray [his son] and I feel like we have finally found a way forward." ■

Wolves and the West: The cost of coexistence

By Daniel Munch
American Farm Bureau Federation economist

While the expansion of gray and Mexican gray wolf populations is often hailed as a conservation success, the consequences for ranching families can be gruesome, costly and complex - threatening the safety of ranch families and their pets and livestock, as well as the long-term survival of multigenerational ranches and the rural economies they anchor.

Focusing on the Mexican gray wolf, a recent University of Arizona study analyzes both direct livestock depredation and indirect effects such as stress-induced weight loss and elevated management costs based on 2024 cattle prices.

Findings are based on survey responses from impacted ranchers, modeling of herd-level financial outcome and county-level livestock performance trends.

In areas with wolf presence, even a moderate level of impact, such as 2% calf loss, 3.5% weight reduction and average management costs, can reduce annual ranch revenue by 28%.

While the study focuses on Mexican gray wolves in the Southwest, the core challenges it identifies, such as livestock depredation, herd stress and weight loss, increased management costs and difficulties accessing timely compensation, are not unique to that region.

Ranchers across the Northern Rockies, Pacific Northwest and Great Lakes states report similar experiences as wolf populations have expanded.

Because these economic stressors stem from common predator-prey dynamics and livestock production systems, the study's findings provide a credible framework for estimating broader impacts.

This Market Intel draws on that foundation to illustrate the tangible financial risks associated with predator recovery and highlight the need for responsive, producer-informed wildlife policy in all regions affected by wolf activity.

Background

When the gray wolf was listed under the Endangered Species Act in 1978, the species was nearly extinct in all lower 48 U.S. states except Minnesota, where they were classified as threatened.

The species' steep decline was largely driven by federally supported predator control efforts and bounty programs aimed at eliminating wolves to reduce conflicts with livestock, pets and rural communities.

Many ranching communities were established at the same time as government-backed removal, when wolf presence was minimal or nonexistent, shaping generations of land use and livestock management in their absence.

In 1982, Congress amended the Endangered Species Act to authorize the establishment of experimental populations of endangered or threatened species to aid in species recovery.

After years of controversy, 66 gray wolves were ultimately released into central Idaho and Yellowstone National Park in 1995 and 1996.

A few years later, in 1998, the Mexican gray wolf, the smallest subspecies of gray wolf, was reintroduced into the wild through a program centered in the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area, spanning rugged public lands across eastern Arizona and western New Mexico.

Most recently, after a state-wide ballot initiative supported the reintroduction of wolves in Colorado, Colorado Parks and Wildlife partnered with Oregon wildlife officials to translocate 10 gray wolves from multiple Oregon packs and released them onto state-owned public lands in Grand and Summit counties.

Today, gray wolf populations have grown beyond their original reintroduction levels and regions, reflecting the success of recovery efforts and intensifying their presence on Western rangelands.

Direct depredation

The most immediate and visible impact of wolf presence on rangelands is direct livestock loss from confirmed depredation. These incidents most commonly involve calves, but cows and more rarely, bulls, horses and dogs, can also be affected.

For ranchers, the loss of a calf represents a full loss in revenue, regardless of the animal's age or weight at the time of death. Whether the calf was 1 day old or nearly ready for market, the rancher loses its full market value, estimated at $1,336 per head in 2024 (for a 525 lb. calf). Actual impacts may vary year to year depending on market prices.

The University of Arizona study modeled the one-year impact of calf losses due to depredation. A 2% loss of calves could reduce a 367-head ranch's net income by 4%, or about $5,195, for that year. At higher loss levels, such as 14% of calves, net income could fall by as much as 34%, or roughly $42,599, in that same year.

When a cow is killed, the financial hit extends over multiple years: the operation not only loses that year's calf, but also future offspring, along with the revenue and herd stability that cow would have provided.

Ranchers then have to more frequently retain replacement heifers or buy additional replacements. This means fewer animals are available for sale, working capital must be used to buy additional replacements and herd development is ultimately delayed.

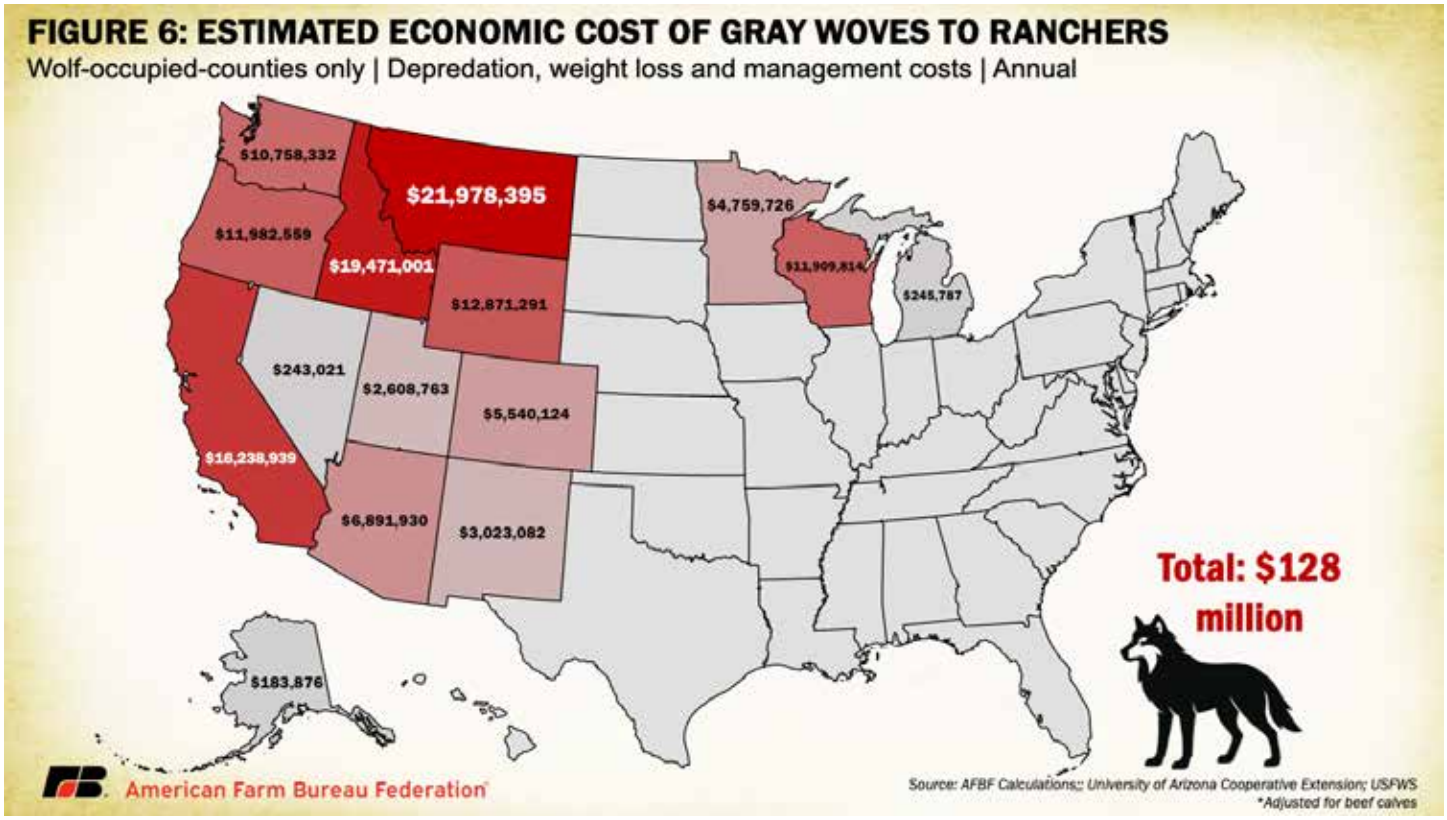
Excluding these long-term impacts, the revenue loss associated with the loss of a single cow was estimated at $2,673.

Depredation rates vary significantly between ranches, influenced by factors such as landscape features, alternative prey availability (e.g., deer and elk), proximity to roads or human development and whether wolves have recently visited the area.

Previous analysis has estimated an average wolf-related calf depredation rate of 1.9%, though actual rates can vary widely.

In the University of Arizona survey, 38% of respondents reported confirmed wolf depredation on their ranches.

For this broader analysis estimating total state-by-state losses attributed to wolves, we apply these assumptions to the number of



beef calves estimated to be present in counties with wolf presence (as defined by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service).

Calf numbers were derived using 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture data, with calves estimated to make up approximately 15% of total cattle inventory in states with wolf populations. To avoid overstating exposure, each county's cattle inventory was adjusted to exclude dairy cows, which are generally less likely to graze on open rangeland.

The calculated value of calves lost under this scenario assumes each calf is valued at $1,336. This generates a loss of 13,514 calves out of an inventory of 1.87 million calves valued at $18 million in wolf-occupied counties.

The states with the highest number of calf depredations under this scenario are Montana ($3 million; ~2,307 calves) and Idaho ($2.7 million; ~2,044 calves).

Keep in mind this method assumes static wolf presence at the county level. Wolves regularly traverse dozens of miles per day, crossing county and state borders, so county-level presence can vary widely year to year.

Indirect losses: physiological stress

In addition to the loss of individual animals, the presence of wolves introduces chronic stress that can disrupt cattle health and productivity. Even without a direct attack, cattle sense predator cues, like scent, tracks or howling, which triggers a survival response.

As a result, cattle spend less time grazing and more time bunched together, alert and on the move. This reduces forage intake, slows weight gain and lowers overall body condition.

Stress can also suppress estrus cycles and reduce conception rates, especially in herds that have previously experienced depredation. Calves may wean at lower weights, lowering sale value.

Importantly, these impacts often occur even on ranches that haven't experienced direct losses, highlighting how just the presence of wolves can erode ranch profitability over time.

The University of Arizona found 58% of those surveyed had stress- or depredation-related wolf impacts on their operation, compared to just 38% reporting depredation.

The Arizona model found that a 3.5% reduction in average calf weaning weight (18.4 pounds) — a figure supported by published field research — can significantly reduce revenues across an entire herd.

At the $2.54 per pound value reference in their study ($1,336/525 lb. average), a ranch operation that markets 80 head would lose out on $3,738 in marketable weight value.

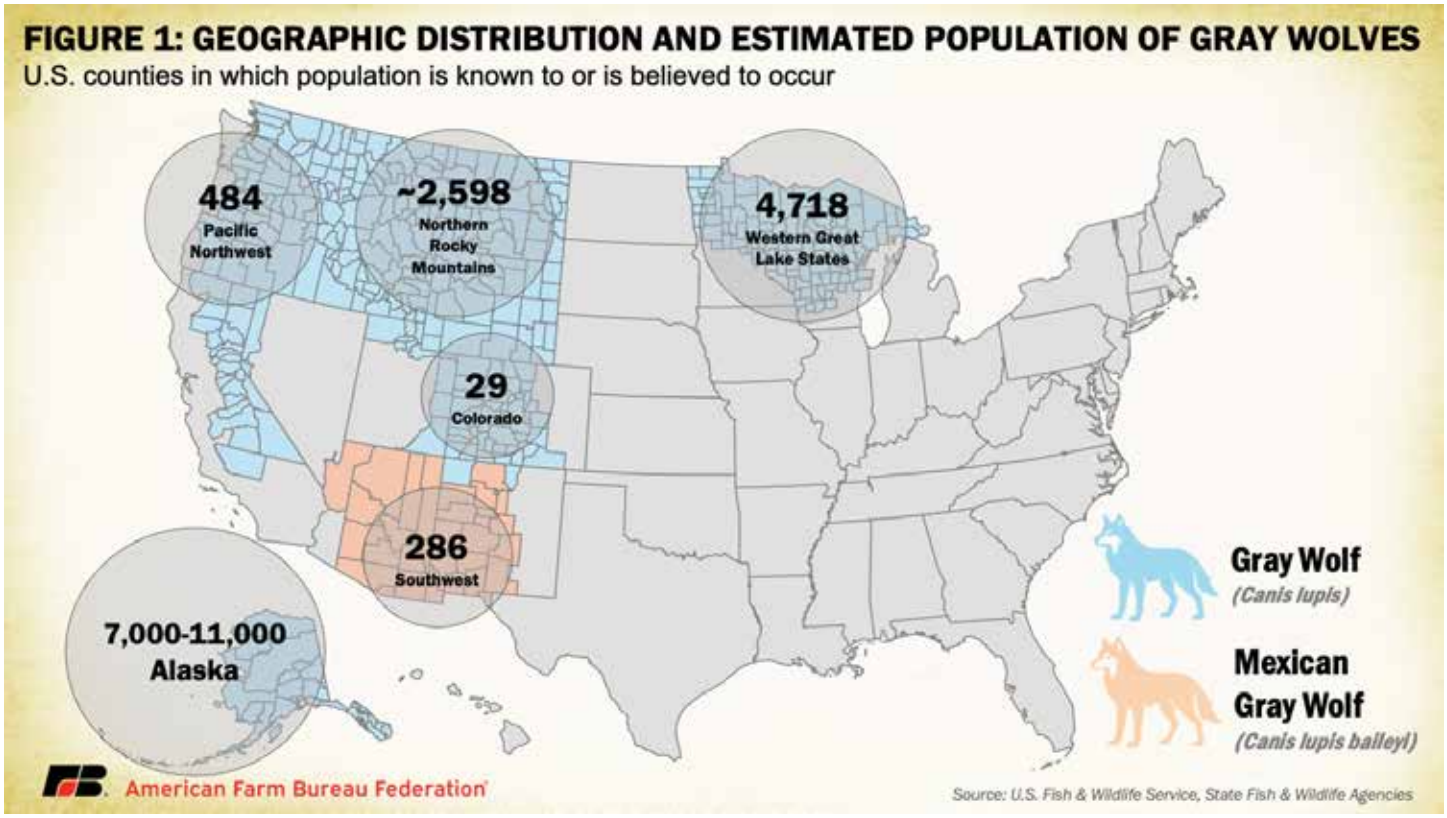
Weight loss can be much higher in regions with elevated wolf activity. If that same ranch experienced a 10% reduction in weaning weight, the loss would exceed $10,600 before even factoring in additional impacts like reduced conception rates.

In total, over $50 million in potential calf weight value was lost due to wolf presence, including $8.6 million in Montana and $7.6 million in Idaho alone.

Increased mitigation costs

Beyond lost livestock and reduced productivity, wolf presence forces ranchers to change the way they manage their operations, often at a steep cost.

In wolf-occupied areas, ranchers routinely implement addition-



al strategies to deter predation, respond to attacks and monitor herds across expansive rangelands. These management efforts are both labor- and resource-intensive.

Preventative measures may include altering grazing rotations to avoid wolf-active areas, confining livestock during vulnerable periods, hauling feed and water to secure locations, and hiring range riders to maintain human presence near herds.

Many producers also invest in tools such as trail cameras, turbo fladry (lines of fluttering flagging attached to electrified fencing used to deter wolves) and sometime access telemetry devices (like GPS collars) to track wolves and avoid conflict.

These measures incur direct expenses in fuel, equipment, labor and supplemental feed, as well as indirect costs like deferred maintenance and lost time.

According to the University of Arizona study, ranchers reported an average cost of $79 per cow for conflict avoidance measures and associated labor.

Even before accounting for any depredation or stress-related weight loss, these management expenses alone reduced net returns for the average ranch by 19%.

Through interviews and surveys, producers indicated they spent anywhere from several thousand dollars to over $150,000 per year on these efforts.

For our analysis, we convert the $79 per cow figure to $55.30 per calf based on their 70% calf crop assumption. We then apply this per-calf cost to estimate statewide wolf management expenses, using the study's finding that 58% of ranchers in wolf-occupied counties experience wolf-induced stressors.

Based on these assumptions, ranchers nationwide spend over $60 million each year on efforts to mitigate the impacts of gray wolves.

Importantly, these costs are often incurred even when wolves are not actively present in a given season. The mere threat of predation, and the uncertainty it creates, forces ranchers to implement precautionary strategies year-round, consuming labor and resources regardless of actual wolf activity.

These growing management burdens add another layer of economic strain to ranching in wolf-occupied regions, costs that, while harder to quantify than a dead calf, accumulate quickly and erode the long-term sustainability of the operation.

Putting it all together

All combined, on a ranch experiencing a modest 2% calf depredation and 3.5% weight loss that also spends the average reported amount on conflict avoidance, annual ranch revenues are reduced by 28% ($34,642).

The University of Arizona study also didn't just look at one year, it projected what repeated losses from wolves would do to a ranch's profitability over 30 years.

Even a moderate level of impact – losing 2% of calves and 3.5% lower weights – would reduce the ranch's net present value by over $191,000. In plain terms, that's a 45% drop in the ranch's long-term earning potential.

The study estimates that, without wolf impacts, the ranch would generate about $420,000 in long-term profits (in today's dollars). With average wolf-related losses, that shrinks to $228,000.

While a single year's loss might seem manageable, the effects compound over time; smaller calf crops mean fewer replacements

and fewer animals to sell, while lower weights reduce revenue year after year.

These cumulative impacts ripple through herd management and finances, steadily eroding profitability and increasing the odds that the operation may not be financially sustainable in the long run.

Compensation gaps and conclusions

While many states and federal agencies offer compensation for confirmed livestock losses due to wolves, ranchers report persistent challenges in accessing these programs.

Verifying a depredation requires finding the carcass quickly, often in remote or rugged terrain, and meeting strict evidence thresholds that can be hard to satisfy, especially when scavengers disturb remains.

In the University of Arizona study, 55% of surveyed ranchers said they had experienced at least one wolf depredation that went uncompensated.

Additionally, when depredation does occur, the process of locating carcasses, coordinating investigations and filing paperwork for compensation (if available) can require six to 10 hours per incident — resources often uncompensated and undervalued.

For some ranchers, the effort and uncertainty involved in confirming a depredation make compensation programs not worth pursuing at all.

Even when compensation is granted, it typically only covers the market value of the animal lost.

USDA's Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP), one of the primary federal tools available to livestock producers, only reimburses 75% of the fair market value of qualifying animals lost to federally protected predators like wolves.

It does not account for the additional costs ranchers bear: lost future production, veterinary expenses for injured animals, stress-related weight loss or the thousands of dollars spent annually on prevention and mitigation.

As a result, ranchers are often left absorbing the bulk of the financial impact of policies shaped far beyond their fenceposts.

That's the heart of the issue. For many ranching families, the return of wolves is not just a wildlife management question, it's a daily reality shaped by decisions made in distant urban centers, often by voters and officials who will never have to look into the eyes of a mother cow searching for her calf.

Ranchers are the ones bearing the real-world costs of policies shaped far from the range. And they're doing so while continuing to care for livestock, steward the land and feed a growing world.

If predator recovery efforts are to be economically sustainable, they must be accompanied by policies that recognize the people on the front lines: those whose livelihoods now depend not only on their animals, but on a system that values and supports the cost of coexistence. ■

U of I submits revised proposal for $59 million grant

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

MOSCOW, Idaho – University of Idaho has submitted an amended version of the Innovative Agriculture and Marketing Partnership (IAMP) grant to the United States Department of Agriculture to meet revised federal guidelines placing greater emphasis on marketing and direct payments to producers.

Originally awarded in 2024, the nearly $59 million IAMP grant was the largest in U of I's history, intended to provide payments to Idaho producers for developing sustainable agricultural practices.

The grant was terminated in April 2025 due to new criteria from USDA which required at least 65% of grant funds go directly to producers. In the original IAMP proposal, more than half of the funding was allocated for direct incentive payments to producers, with the rest of the grant, excluding direct administrative costs, intended to provide technical and marketing services to enrolled producers — saving them the cost of contracting those services independently.

USDA gave U of I the opportunity to resubmit the IAMP grant, with revisions to more closely align with USDA's new Advancing Markets for Producers (AMP) initiative.

U of I's revised proposal includes $39.2 million in direct incentives to producers, which is 66% of the overall budget. These funds include reimbursements for implementing approved conservation practices, similar to the original proposal.

The updated proposal also includes $3.5 million in direct payments to producers for marketing efforts, which is a main focus of the AMP initiative.

In the revised proposal, research would continue at five U of I research and Extension centers, focusing on evaluating the effectiveness of approved conservation practices.

Some of the original research objectives, such as required on-farm soil sampling and in-field baseline comparisons, would be scaled back to direct more funds toward marketing efforts.

The revised proposal will provide more resources to growers on how to best market sustainably grown products to increase revenues.

As of March, the IAMP project had received applications from 201 Idaho producers representing 34 Idaho counties, across seven commodities.

Several producers had completed all the paperwork and were enrolled, and others were in the final stages.

Producers will be the first to be notified if U of I's resubmitted proposal is accepted. USDA has indicated that a response about the revised proposal should be received within 30-60 days. ■

A look at Idaho crop acres in 2025

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Photo by Sean Ellis

Idaho farmers planted 315,000 acres of potatoes this year, the same as last year, according to a USDA report.

POCATELLO – USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service projects Idaho's planted potato acres total 315,000 this year, the same as last year.

The Idaho Potato Commission did its own comprehensive potato acre count and came up with 313,045 spud acres planted in the state in 2025.

Of that total, the IPC estimates about 32,850 acres are designated for seed potato production.

According to NASS, 912,000 acres of potatoes were planted in the United States this year, down from 930,000 last year.

Idaho remains the No. 1 potato-producing state in the nation.

Industry projections earlier in the year estimated spud acreage would be down this year, due to plentiful supply and low farm-level prices.

While the Idaho spud acreage may be higher than many people expected, IPC President and CEO Jamey Higham said Gem State farmers will find a home for this year's crop.

"We'll sell them, one way or another," he said.

The spud acreage projections are contained in a June 30 NASS report, which also estimated planted acres of other major crops. The report includes national as well as state-level estimates.

It projects Idaho farmers planted 540,000 acres of barley this year, up slightly from 530,000 last year. Idaho normally leads the nation in total barley production and will again this year.

Idaho Barley Commission Executive Director Laura Wilder said farmers are a long way from having grain in the bin this year, but she believes this year's crop will be close to last year's as far as total production.

"From what I'm hearing in the field … the crop will be fairly even with last year," she said.

It could be up or down a few percentage points, depending on growing conditions, she said. "People are feeling the crop is looking really good at this point."

NASS projects planted Idaho wheat acres at 1.2 million this year, down slightly from 1.21 million last year, and it estimates Idaho hay acres at 1.17 million, down from 1.25 million in 2024.

It has Idaho alfalfa hay acreage in 2025 at 890,000, down from 940,000 in 2024. Idaho has led the nation in total alfalfa production in recent years.

Sugar beet acres in Idaho are projected at 169,000 in 2025, down from 173,000 in 2024.

Planted Idaho corn acres are estimated at 390,000, up from 380,000, and chickpea acreage is projected at 96,000, down from 97,000.

According to the NASS report, Idaho now leads the nation in total safflower acres. It estimates Idaho farmers planted 32,000 acres of safflower this year, up from 18,500 last year.

That puts Idaho at No. 1 for that crop, ahead of California, which dropped from 38,000 planted acres last year to 30,000 this year.

In Idaho, safflower is mainly grown in the eastern part of the state, said Rockland dryland farmer Cory Kress, who planted 900 acres of safflower this year, more than normal, in anticipation of a hot and dry summer.

"Safflower is super drought-tolerant," he said.

According to NASS, Idaho farmers planted 87,000 acres of canola this year, down from 97,000 last year.

Idaho dry bean acreage was projected at 55,000 acres, up from 45,000 last year, and dry edible pea acreage is estimated at 21,000 acres, up from 11,000.

NASS projects Idaho farmers planted 4.07 million acres of principal crops in 2025, down slightly from 4.14 million last year. Principal crops include potatoes, corn, oats, barley, rye, winter wheat, wheat, sunflower, dry edible beans, chickpeas, sugar beets, and canola.

According to the Census of Agriculture, Idaho has 22,800-plus farmers and ranchers and more than 11 million acres of land in farming. This includes 5.6 million acres of cropland and 5 million acres of pastureland. ■

Photo courtesy of InterMountain Beef

From left, Carson, Cevin and Curtis Jones, shown here at a conference in Florida, run a family-owned feedlot, InterMountain Beef near Eden in southeastern Idaho. They are the first in Idaho to install roller compacted concrete in the pens.

InterMountain Beef's investment in roller compacted concrete pays off

By Dianna Troyer
For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Muddy pens are a fading memory for the staff at InterMountain Beef in south central Idaho.

To improve drainage and boost cattle performance, roller compacted concrete footing was installed at the 30,000-head feedlot about 16 miles east of Twin Falls near Eden.

"We're the first feedlot in Idaho to line our pens and runoff pond with RCC," said Cevin Jones, CEO and the third generation to work at the 200-acre family-owned operation.

"To stay in business, you have to find ways to innovate and be more efficient and competitive," he said.

Through his consultants, Jones learned about RCC, a mixture of cement, aggregates, and water but with less water content than traditional cement.

"There's a sizeable cost upfront, but it's been well worth it," Jones said. "We looked at the data, and the payback is definitely there. There's better winter performance with the cattle. They benefit with improved footing, and we still use bedding."

The three-year project was finally finished last fall.

Pens were initially cleared out and regraded so drainage would flow toward a lined pond. After putting down a base layer, 6 inches of RCC was installed.

"We're glad we did it," Jones said. "It's made a big difference during winter. It's easier to manage cattle without dealing with mud. Pens are easier to clean. Without erosion, we don't have to haul in dirt either."

The footing project coincided with the announcement that True West Beef would open a plant near Jerome about 20 miles west of Eden and would partner with local producers.

Jones nearly doubled production to 30,000 head to be ready when the plant began processing cattle in April 2023.

Cattle come to InterMountain from throughout the West, especially the Pacific Northwest.

InterMountain's production is at capacity, which Jones thinks would please his grandfather, Henry Jones, who started the feedlot in 1946.

Henry and Cevin's father, Calvin, both shared an attitude of innovation and were doing soil testing in the 1950s to protect the land from runoff. A lake north of the feedlot, filled with summer irrigation water, benefits wildlife.

Family members are still leading the business, with Cevin's son, Carson, working as assistant manager and his brother, Curtis, running the farming side of the business.

Along with custom feeding, they buy feeder cattle, background cattle of all classes and weights, and offer retained ownership to provide a producer the opportunity to follow his cattle through the entire feeding process. ■

DID YOU KNOW?

Idaho has over 55 farmers markets with local vendors providing Idaho grown and raised products throughout the state.

IDAHO FARMERS MARKET MONTH

Governor Little has officially proclaimed August as the third annual Idaho Farmers Market Month. In celebration, Idaho Preferred and the Idaho Farmers Market Association are joining forces to recognize the vital role farmers markets play in supporting Idaho's economy and enhancing our way of life. Farmers markets are key links in our local food system, providing communities statewide with convenient access to peak-season, locally grown produce. They foster meaningful connections between consumers and the farmers, ranchers, and food producers who nourish our communities. More than just places to buy food, farmers markets serve as vibrant gathering spaces that strengthen local economies and deepen our connection to the land and each other.

Visit your local farmers market this month and celebrate with us!

IDAHO FARMERS MARKET FINDER

The Idaho Preferred website is your one-stop resource for discovering local Idaho agricultural products and experiences. Our comprehensive Farmers Market Finder makes it simple to locate markets and vendors near you.

With over 55 markets statewide, the directory lets you filter by region, day of the week, drive-thru availability, mobile markets, and whether they accept SNAP or participate in Double Up Food Bucks. If you're passionate about supporting Idaho farmers, this tool makes it easy to find a farmers market that fits your needs.

VISIT: HTTPS://IDAHOPREFERRED.COM/PRODUCTS/FARMERS-MARKETS/

NEW!

IDAHO FARM STAND DIRECTORY

Idaho's farm stands provide a wide range of seasonal produce, with each stand providing its own unique charm and selection, showcasing the best of what Idaho's farmers have to offer.
Did you know that Idaho has over 80 farm, ranch, and dairy stands throughout the state? Farm stands offer an easy and convenient way to support local agriculture while enjoying top-quality products straight from Idaho's land. From fresh fruits and vegetables to homemade jams, artisan cheeses, and baked goods, these stands are brimming with the rich flavors and traditions of our state. Many farm stands operate seasonally or throughout the year, providing a reliable source for fresh, local food that also helps reduce the carbon footprint of long-distance transportation. Shopping locally isn't just about the food, it's about forging connections with the farmers who cultivate it, fostering a deeper sense of community. **Browse our statewide farm stand directory** to find fresh food, flowers, meat, and other products near you.

VISIT: IDAHOPREFERRED.COM/PRODUCTS/FARM-STANDS/

Idaho State Department of Agriculture

Idaho Farm Bureau
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Understanding drought stress in conifers

By Audra Cochran
University of Idaho

In the July issue of Gem State Producer, my colleague Randy Brooks, University of Idaho Extension forestry specialist, wrote a great article on understanding the signs of tree issues that can arise during the summer months.

One topic he mentioned was drought stress in conifers. Given that much of northcentral Idaho and the surrounding region is currently experiencing D3-level drought, a classification of "extreme drought" by the U.S. Drought Monitor, it felt timely to delve a little deeper into this specific topic.

The past few years have brought an increasing number of hot, dry summers across Idaho. If we look back to the summer of 2021, the drought conditions were very similar to what we're seeing now: low snowpack, minimal rainfall, high temperatures, and windy conditions all resemble the 2021 season.

While conifer species in our region are well adapted to occasional dry spells, prolonged drought conditions can have serious and lasting effects on tree health.

For family forest owners, an important piece of maintaining a healthy forest is understanding how drought stress develops, and what you can to do to help your trees during periods of prolonged stress.

What is drought stress?

Drought stress occurs when trees lose more water through evaporation and transpiration than they can absorb from the soil. In other words, the tree is not getting enough water to meet its maintenance requirements to live and grow.

This imbalance leads to physiological changes that can reduce growth, impair defenses, and eventually kill trees, either directly or through increased vulnerability to secondary issues, such as insects and disease.

What to look for

In Randy's article, he provided a brief list of symptoms that commonly signal drought stress in trees, such as thinning crowns and top dieback. These tell-tale symptoms can be subtle at first. Needles may turn yellow or red prematurely, or the tree may drop older needles to conserve moisture.

In addition to these symptoms, you may also see the following signs in your trees:

- Shortened needle length and reduced annual growth. These are signs that a tree is conserving resources.
- Increased cone production. Trees may "panic produce" cones in response to drought, attempting to reproduce before conditions worsen.

Oregon State University Extension photo

Top dieback is a common symptom of drought stress in conifers.

One of the most common outcomes of prolonged drought is a weakened immune system. As trees become stressed, they release semiochemicals that can signal to insects that the trees defenses are down.

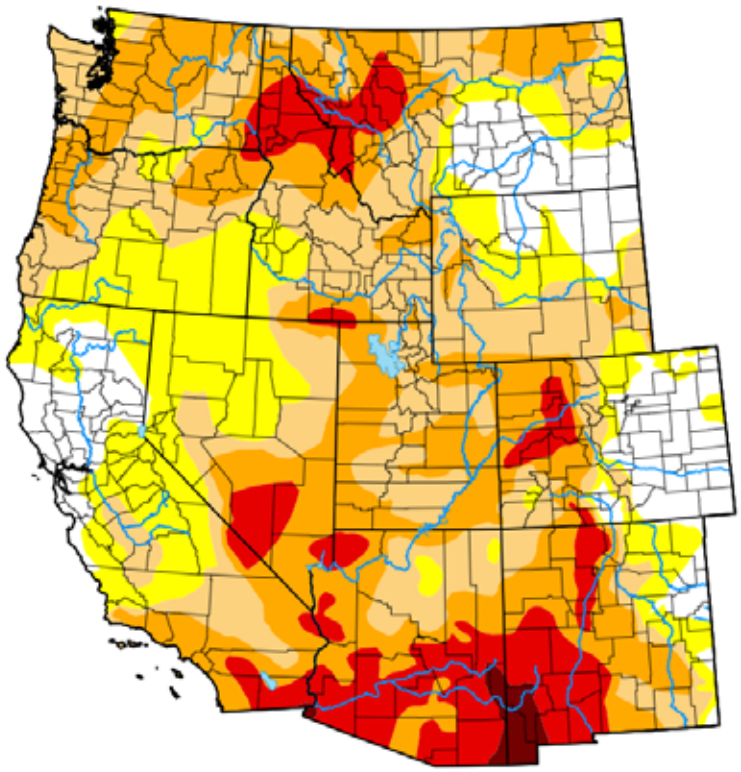
Bark beetles, root pathogens like Armillaria, and canker diseases can all take advantage of a weakened host.

Additionally, stressed trees are more susceptible to damage from environmental or mechanical factors such as road salts, chemical exposure, or wind events. In many cases, it's the combination of drought and a secondary issue that leads to tree mortality.

Species sensitivities

While there is no such thing as a "shade-loving" tree, some species are better adapted to survive on hotter, drier sites

LEFT: **Prolonged drought conditions can have varying effects on tree health. This stand near St. Maries ID is experiencing some challenges, likely exacerbated by the extreme drought conditions.** Photo by Audra Cochran



Current map showing drought conditions in the Western US. Image courtesy of US Drought Monitor

with increased sun exposure.

Among Idaho's major conifer species, Western larch, ponderosa pine, lodgepole pine, and Western white pine are the least shade tolerant and tend to handle drought stress better.

In contrast, grand fir, Western redcedar, and Western hemlock are more shade tolerant and more likely to suffer on dry sites. Douglas-fir, Engelmann spruce, and subalpine fir fall somewhere in the middle and may experience drought stress depending on site conditions.

Drought and fire

Drought doesn't just affect tree health, but it also alters wildfire behavior. Dry soils, reduced live fuel moisture, and increased dead woody debris all contribute to more intense and fast-moving fires.

Trees that are drought-stressed are more likely to ignite and carry fire up into the canopy.

Given current drought conditions, now is a good time for forest owners to evaluate fuel loads, access roads, and defensible spaces around their homes and structures. This is especially important if your property is in the wildland-urban interface or near other high-risk areas.

What you can do

While we can't control the weather, there are steps forest landowners can take to reduce the impacts of drought:

1. Thin overstocked stands. Reducing competition helps remaining trees access more resources, including water. Prioritize the healthiest, most vigorous individuals, and favor species best suited for the site.
2. Favor drought-tolerant species. When planting or selecting trees to retain, consider species that are better adapted to your site's moisture availability.
3. Monitor and remove high-risk trees. Trees showing signs of severe decline may become hazardous or serve as breeding sites for bark beetles and other insects and diseases.
4. Plan for fire. Drought increases wildfire risk. Keep defensible space around structures, clear debris, and manage ladder fuels to reduce the chance of crown fire.

Looking ahead

Drought conditions will likely continue to affect our region in the years ahead. This does not suggest a need for panic, but being proactive can go a long way in helping forest owners meet their forest management goals and maintain long-term forest health.

For Idaho's family forest owners, drought stress is one more reason to stay engaged with your forest. Walk your property regularly, keep records of what you observe, and don't hesitate to reach out to your local Extension office, Idaho Department of Lands forester, or consulting forester for support.

With informed management, your forest can remain both productive and resilient, rain or shine. ■

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

Photo courtesy of Jessica Zaubi

Jessica Zaubi, a second-year intern with University of Idaho's Sandpoint Organic Agriculture Center, works in a cut flower garden she started at the facility this summer.

Interns making impacts at U of I's Sandpoint Organic Center

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

As a second-year summer intern with University of Idaho's Sandpoint Organic Agriculture Center (SOAC), Jessica Zaubi is starting a new cut flower production program.

Zaubi, who lives with her family in Sandpoint, is one of three SOAC interns this summer, aiding in the facility's daily operations and learning the basics of organic agriculture.

The other two interns are both in their first summer at SOAC and are residing on site.

In the summer of 2024, SOAC received $15,000 from the San Francisco-based Maxwell-Hanrahan Foundation in support of the internship. Pleased by the results, the foundation committed $75,000 over three years toward the program, beginning with $25,000 this summer.

Local market farmers Leigh Bercaw and Nicole Gowdy work closely with the interns as SOAC instructors.

Zaubi, a senior majoring in horticulture and urban agriculture in U of I's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, became interested in adding beds for raising cut flowers at SOAC during her first summer as an intern, after

Bercaw took her on a tour of another area commercial garden that raised gorgeous flowers.

Experienced SOAC interns are given the opportunity to complete a personal project to diversify the operation. Zaubi has tilled, shaped, prepared and planted five beds for growing cut flowers, such as sunflowers, poppies and zinnias.

The beds are drip-irrigated and are part of the facility's regenerative market garden, which raises 4,000 pounds of produce per year for the Bonner Community Food Bank.

Zaubi anticipates the first flowers will be ready to cut by early August, and they'll likely be given to families using the food bank.

"Growing up, we went to a lot of farmers markets, and I really enjoyed the atmosphere," Zaubi said. "It would be a lot of fun to own a small market garden, and most of them are organic."

Zaubi believes the internship is giving her a solid background for a future in small-scale food production, including her first experience with operating heavy machinery.

"I don't come from a farming background, and I'm a very hands-on learner," Zaubi said. "I feel like there's a bit of a disconnect in the classroom, and I've gotten more connected here."

She learned about SOAC as a freshman when Kyle Nagy, superintendent and orchard operations manager, visited her Plant Science 102 class, bringing an assortment of heirloom apples raised in the orchard for them to sample.

She and her father enjoy apple picking together, so she brought him to the orchard for its fall public apple tasting.

Last summer, Zaubi and fellow intern Kat Vanderbilt used funding from the local Kinnikinnick Native Plant Society to revitalize SOAC's native plant garden, cleaning up beds, adding plant varieties better suited to the area and installing an irrigation system.

This summer's interns are aiding Kendall Kahl, an assistant professor and Extension specialist of sustainable organic agriculture, in creating a trial at SOAC comparing several cover crop blends.

Internships have been offered in Sandpoint since 2014; however, the program has grown since the university acquired the facility in 2018. Kent Youngdahl, SOAC assistant operations manager, started with the facility as an intern, working four summers there while pursing a major in sustainable food systems and a minor in soil science at U of I.

After Youngdahl graduated, Nagy offered him a job as a SOAC manager.

Youngdahl was promoted to supervisor and held that job for a couple of years before being promoted to his current position, in which he's tasked with tending to daily functions of the facility, overseeing a rotational grazing project involving chickens and sheep and caring for the heirloom orchard.

"You learn all of these theories in college, but what can you do with that if you never get to apply it?" Youngdahl asked. "You can see the literal fruits of your labor at the end of the summer, so there is that rewarding aspect of it." ■

Photo by Paul Boehlke

Gov. Brad Little hosted U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert Kennedy Jr. July 23 to discuss Idaho's role in the Making America Healthy Again movement. "Thank you, Governor Little, for leading the charge to keep Idaho healthy," Kennedy, left, said during a brief media event. The HHS secretary lauded Idaho for "not waiting on Washington – you're improving nutrition … [and] backing farmers at the heart of this movement…." According to the governor's office, Little, a farmer and rancher, and Kennedy gathered a small group of state agency directors, legislators and stakeholders earlier in the day to share ideas and celebrate MAHA progress in Idaho. During the media availability, Little proclaimed August as Keeping Idaho Healthy Month.

Idaho hop acres declining rapidly

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

WILDER – Idaho hop acres are projected to decline 12 percent this year, after falling 33 percent last year.

According to USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service, Idaho hop farmers strung 5,109 acres of hops this year, down from 5,797 acres last year.

Oregon looks to re-pass Idaho this year as the No. 2 hop state, at least as far as total acreage goes. NASS estimates Oregon farmers strung 5,421 acres of hops in 2025, down 4 percent from 5,635 last year.

Idaho passed Oregon in 2018 to become the No. 2 state in total hop acres.

However, when it comes to total hop production, Idaho has been the No. 2 state for even longer because of higher average hop yields per acre.

Idaho hop acres typically average 100-400 pounds per acre more than Oregon hop acres.

For example, hop acres in Idaho averaged 2,273 pounds per acre in 2024 compared with 1,732 in Oregon, according to NASS.

However, there have been years when the two states were close in hop yields. In 2022, yields averaged 1,733 pounds per acre in Idaho and 1,729 in Oregon.

So, whether Idaho will hang onto the No. 2 spot in total hop production this year will come down to agronomic conditions and how yields fare in both states.

Washington is the unchallenged leader nationally in hop acres and production. NASS estimates Washington growers strung a total of 31,701 hop acres this year, down 5 percent from last year.

The vast majority of the nation's hop production comes from Washington, Idaho and Oregon.

Beginning in 2011, Idaho hop acres began to soar year after year, going from 2,265 acres in 2011 to 9,694 acres in 2021.

Led by the craft beer craze, total hop acres in the Pacific Northwest rose from 29,787 acres in 2011 to 60,872 acres in 2021.

Now, as the craft beer craze slows, acres are going the other way. PNW hop acres totaled 44,793 in 2024, according to Hop Growers of America.

In Idaho, they are dropping even faster. They fell from a high of 9,694 acres in 2021 to 9,561 in 2022 to 8,645 in 2023 to 5,797 in 2024 and now 5,109 in 2025.

The acreage decline boils down to a simple supply and demand situation.

"In 2024, a striking long inventory of hops triggered widespread acreage reductions of 18 percent in the Pacific Northwest, eliminating over 9,500 acres from production," according to a 2024 report by HGA.

Considering the expansion of PNW hops from 29,787 acres in 2011 to 60,872 in 2021, "In three short years, roughly half of this expansion has been removed," according to the HGA report.

Photo by Sean Ellis

Hops are processed at a facility near Wilder in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo.

NASS forecasts total PNW acreage at 42,231 acres this year, down 6 percent from last year.

In addition to a reduction in acreage, according to HGA, "Growers have faced substantial increases in the cost of production, driven by expansion of harvesting and production capacity to handle a doubling of acreage over the past 10 years, updating equipment, increased labor costs … and inflation in the cost of production inputs."

"Administrative and operating costs associated with food safety, best practices compliance and other customer requirements have also increased," the HGA report added.

Industry leaders told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation last year that Idaho's recent hop acreage reduction has been greater than the PNW as a whole from a percentage standpoint because the overall acreage decline is a result of less demand for certain varieties that were planted here in large numbers.

Hops are used as a bittering and flavoring agent in beer production. Idaho's hop industry is centered in the southwestern part of the state, around Wilder.

In recent years, hops became one of Idaho's top 10 crops in terms of total farm-gate receipts. However, the crop may be posed to drop out of the top 10 this year.

According to NASS, the total value of Idaho's hop crop has declined from $101 million in 2022 to $91 million in 2023 to $69 million in 2024. ■

New U of I air quality specialist helping dairies curb emissions

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

TWIN FALLS – University of Idaho's new Extension air quality specialist, Gilbert Miito, grew up on a mid-sized dairy — at least by the standards of the village of Masaka in central Uganda.

Each morning, Miito and his three brothers awoke at 6 a.m. to milk and tend to their family's six dairy cows. The boys would bike throughout the countryside in search of tall grass, which they swathed with sickles and pedaled to their corral to feed the herd.

The rustic dairy of Miito's childhood contrasts starkly with the state-of-the-art University of Idaho facility where he'll soon be conducting research to help the state's dairy industry characterize and curb its greenhouse gas emissions.

The Idaho Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment (Idaho CAFE) will be the largest research dairy in the U.S. when it starts milking operations in Rupert in early 2026.

CAFE will initially house 400 cows and will gradually grow its capacity to accommodate a herd of up to 2,500 animals.

In Uganda, a typical "big" dairy has about 10 cows, while a small dairy might simply comprise a couple of cows tethered to trees, with most of the milk used for home consumption.

"Having animals is a source of prestige in Uganda," Miito said. "The milk is amazing. It's very organic — natural, grassfed."

Miito began working at U of I's Twin Falls Research and Extension Center on Jan. 6, having completed his undergraduate education in his home country before moving to the Pacific Northwest to earn a doctorate in biological systems engineering from Washington State University, where he researched manure management and emissions.

He accepted a postdoctoral research position at the University of Missouri, also working with manure management systems.

He then returned to the West to accept a position with a private company in California, BioFiltro, where he designed, built and supervised the assembly of biological treatment systems using worms and microorganisms to filter liquid dairy waste.

When he saw a posting for the UI Extension position, Miito was enticed both by the perfect fit to put his experience and skills to use and the opportunity to work at a world-class research dairy.

"There is a lot of buzz around dairy farms and emissions, so there is a lot of opportunity around that," Miito said. "The fact that we have CAFE as a research center, I think that improves our chances of getting a lot of these research grants."

The second phase of construction of CAFE – including the maternity barn, research barn, commodity storage, lagoons and an office building with classrooms – is now underway and Miito has begun gathering baseline emissions data from the CAFE site.

This photo courtesy of Gilbet Miito shows Miito posing at University of Idaho's Moscow dairy.

His work will focus on identifying best practices for managing, transporting, storing and using manure to minimize emissions of greenhouse gases such as methane. He's also teamed up with U.S. Department of Agriculture researchers in Kimberly to aid in federal dairy emission studies.

Some of the collaborative projects with USDA have involved working with private, commercial dairymen. He's also helped the federal agency research emissions from manure spread over research plots and lagoon water applied via pivots.

"Right now, we are doing a whole-farm study, getting to understand all of the processes on a dairy farm and how they contribute to emissions to understand the hot spots on a dairy farm and then do some mitigations to test," Miito said.

Most dairy emissions come from the combination of enteric emissions — essentially methane and ammonia in cow belches resulting from fermentation of feed in the rumen — and emissions from dairy manure.

Regarding enteric emissions, Miito plans to evaluate various feed additives to change cows' biochemistry to minimize emissions.

He also intends to study a few options to minimize emissions from lagoons, such as trapping emissions and flaring them off and adding sulfuric acid to chemically change lagoon water and reduce ammonia emissions.

Separating solid and liquid waste is another proven strategy to reduce emissions. Miito intends to study the environmental benefits of more frequent cleaning of solids from dairy lagoons, as well as the use of improved technology for separating dairy liquids and solids.

Animal housing practices also affect dairy emissions. Miito will research how the designs of barns and ventilation systems affect emissions, as well as benefits to be gained through regular cleaning of pens.

In addition to conducting important research to help the dairy industry address forthcoming challenges, Miito views himself as an advocate for the industry and a voice of reason in communicating the realities of the industry to the public. ■

New U of I podcast using AI to promote research

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

MOSCOW, Idaho — In the pilot episode of University of Idaho Extension's new agriculture-themed podcast, the cohosts liken ravenous rodents known as voles to a "crop-destroying army of stealthy, little ninjas."

"Those voles are really putting us to the test lately," the male podcast host explains. "It seems like they're munching on our crops like it's an all-you-can-eat buffet."

The cohosts are never identified, but they demonstrate a thorough knowledge of Idaho agriculture and voice personal frustrations regarding the damage wrought by voles. The twist is the cohosts aren't real people.

The Idaho Short Educational Extension Discussions (SEED) Podcast is created using artificial intelligence (AI), generated from research-based publications and scientific papers authored by UI Extension scientists.

Listeners are told at the beginning of each episode that AI was used to create dialogue, but the science is sound and has been carefully vetted by U of I subject-matter experts.

Episodes will be posted every three weeks and can be accessed by searching for Idaho SEED Podcast on major podcast platforms.

The author of the featured publication will introduce each 20-minute episode, paired with a link to the full text of the research. Idaho SEED will showcase UI Extension's diverse research portfolio for a general audience, without jargon or technical analysis.

Jason Thomas, a UI Extension educator based in Minidoka County who specializes in integrated pest management of insects and rodents, launched Idaho SEED on June 27, using USDA grant funding.

He envisions farmers will tune in while driving their tractors to glean ways to improve their bottom lines. Other stakeholders may marvel at UI Extension's scientific breakthroughs during morning walks.

Thomas believes he's among the early adopters of using AI to make a formal podcast, especially for Extension purposes.

This photo created by Jason Thomas using artificial intelligence shows a farmer listening to the Idaho SEED Podcast while working in his tractor.

"We want to drive people to our publications, and if you understand the 'why' and the 'how,' you are going to get more out of it."

– Jason Thomas, UI Extension educator

Researchers have busy schedules, and AI makes the production process quick and efficient, while distilling complex papers into simple terms. Spanish-language podcasts can also be made with a click of a button.

"I haven't seen people take it to the scale of actually paying for a podcast hosting and doing some professional additions to it," Thomas said of Idaho SEED. "We've got to find every way possible to reach more people and make our content more relevant."

The pilot episode, "The Vole Patrol," is based on Thomas' 2020 bulletin, "Utilizing Barn Owl Boxes for Management of Vole Populations," and offers guidance and designs for making houses for barn owls as a strategy to control voles.

Thomas also used AI technology to

generate the podcast's catchy country and western theme song – "UI experts; the knowledge you need. Right here, right now, it's Idaho SEED!"

UI Extension educators Grant Loomis, Blaine County, and Jared Gibbons, Madison County, will assist Thomas in producing the podcast. Several episodes poised for future release have already been produced.

For example, an episode will cover "Livestock Care for Beginning and Small-scale Producers," which is a bulletin by Extension educator Rebecca Mills, Gem County.

Thomas has a long history of experimenting with new computer technologies. His production process entails entering scientific literature into Google Notebook LM to create multiple podcast versions, sometimes piecing together the best parts from different ones.

The AI software occasionally hallucinates, producing false or misleading information from nonexistent patterns. For example, AI once incorrectly referenced spraying rodenticides on fields, when in actuality they are applied as solid bait.

Fortunately, errors are limited and are easily corrected in editing. Occasional AI tangents surface and can also be deleted.

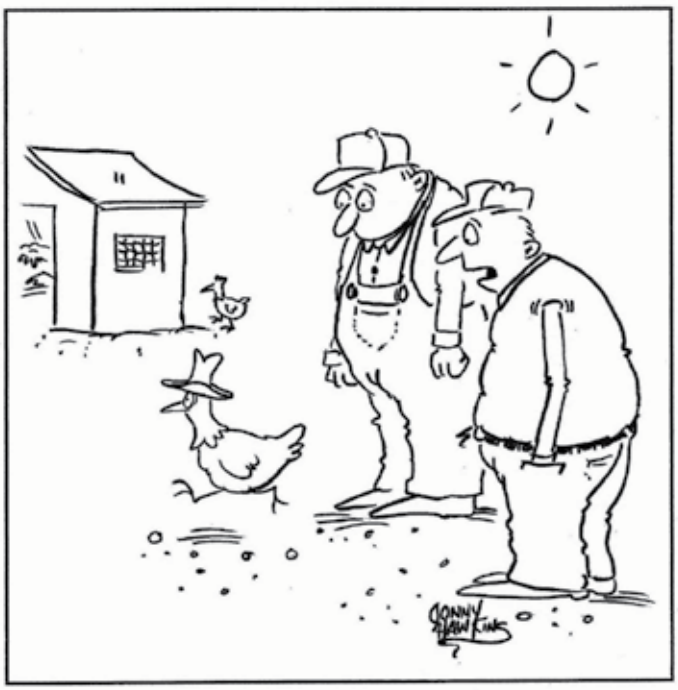
Thomas finds that his AI podcast hosts are prone to telling jokes that usually land flat. He prefers to leave them in the final product, as a humorous reminder that AI still has its shortcomings.

To gauge receptiveness to an AI-generated podcast about Extension research, Thomas surveyed farmers attending Extension pest-management forums. Most respondents were interested and indicated that they'd likely download it.

"What we do as Extension educators is often not easy for farmers to understand," Thomas said. "Large documents can be intimidating for someone who doesn't know what they're looking for. We want to drive people to our publications, and if you understand the 'why' and the 'how,' you are going to get more out of it." ■

Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins



"She specializes in western omelettes."

"My horoscope is really weird today ... what does 'BLT' stand for?"

Wildfire prevention tips for rural property owners

By Audrey Egan
Farm Bureau Insurance Co. of Idaho

Whether you manage a working farm or simply enjoy the quiet that comes with country living, rural life in Idaho comes with a certain level of responsibility, especially during wildfire season.

The open space and distance from town may offer peace and privacy, but it can also mean limited access to emergency services and more self-reliance when disaster strikes.

Wildfire prevention should be a routine part of your rural property maintenance. Taking a few practical steps each year can help reduce risk and protect your home, buildings, equipment, and animals.

In the sections below, we'll outline key tips to help you prepare your rural property for wildfire season.

Fuel storage

Fuel plays an essential role in daily life on a farm or rural property, whether it's powering equipment, heating buildings, or running generators. However, improper storage can turn a necessity into a serious fire hazard.

If you're using above-ground fuel tanks, consider adding a fire-resistant barrier or gravel pad underneath. It's also important to avoid storing fuel inside barns, garages, or any structure where livestock or machinery are kept.

To further reduce risk, consider these best practices:

- Keep fuel at least 30 feet away from any buildings, ideally in a separate, well-ventilated shed or enclosure.
- Use containers that meet safety standards, such as UL-listed metal or heavy-duty plastic fuel cans, and clearly label each one.
- Maintain a clear area around tanks, free from dry vegetation, tools, and other combustible materials.
- Check containers regularly for signs of leaks, rust, or other damage.
- Install fire extinguishers nearby and ensure everyone on the property knows how to operate them in an emergency.

'Ultimately, wildfire prevention goes beyond protecting structures or equipment. It's about preserving the life you've built and the land that sustains it.'

Structure spacing

Creating physical space between buildings is one of the most effective ways to slow the spread of wildfire. When structures are too close together or surrounded by dry vegetation, fires can move quickly and with devastating results.

What to keep in mind:

- Leave 30-50 feet between structures when possible. This creates a firebreak and slows the spread of flames.
- Maintain "defensible space" around all structures. The first 30 feet should be regularly mowed and kept free of flammable debris like brush, lumber, or stored hay.
- Trim back trees that overhang buildings or power lines.
- Use fire-resistant building materials for roofs, siding, and decks when building new structures or making upgrades.

Equipment safety

Heavy equipment and power tools can pose a fire hazard, especially during hot, dry conditions. Even routine tasks like mowing, welding, or pulling a trailer can unintentionally spark a wildfire.

In fact, wildfires caused by equipment are among the most common types of human-started wildfires. To help minimize risk, keep these tips in mind when using equipment:

- Avoid mowing, welding, or grinding on high-fire-risk days. Early mornings are typically safer due to higher humidity.
- Inspect equipment before use for loose chains, worn parts, or faulty exhaust systems that could throw sparks.
- Keep a shovel, water supply, and fire extinguisher nearby when using equipment in dry areas.
- Clean engines and compartments regularly, especially during harvest or baling, when dry debris can collect quickly.
- Use spark arrestors on ATVs, chainsaws, and other small engines to prevent accidental ignition.

Protecting what matters most

Living in a rural setting offers peace, space, and the chance to build something truly your own. It also means taking wildfire risks seriously and being prepared before a threat arises. Here are a few additional ways to stay wildfire-ready:

- Stay informed of wildfire conditions and red flag warnings. Sign up for wildfire alerts through the Idaho Department of Lands to receive timely updates during fire season. It's also a good idea to follow your local National Weather Service office for fire weather forecasts and check with your county emergency management office to register for local evacuation and emergency alerts.
- Coordinate with nearby landowners. Share contact information with your neighbors and work together to identify shared firebreak opportunities, coordinate grazing or clearing schedules, and develop a simple communication plan for fire alerts or evacuation needs.
- Review your insurance policy annually. Connect with your local Idaho Farm Bureau Insurance agent to review your coverage and receive guidance specific to your land, structures, and needs.

Ultimately, wildfire prevention goes beyond protecting structures or equipment. It's about preserving the life you've built and the land that sustains it.

By making wildfire prevention part of your regular routine, you're investing in long-term safety, peace of mind, and the strength of your rural community. ■

(Disclaimer: The information included here is designed for informational purposes only. It is not legal, tax, financial or any other sort of advice, nor is it a substitute for such advice. The information may not apply to your specific situation. We have tried to make sure the information is accurate, but it could be outdated or even inaccurate in parts.)

Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins

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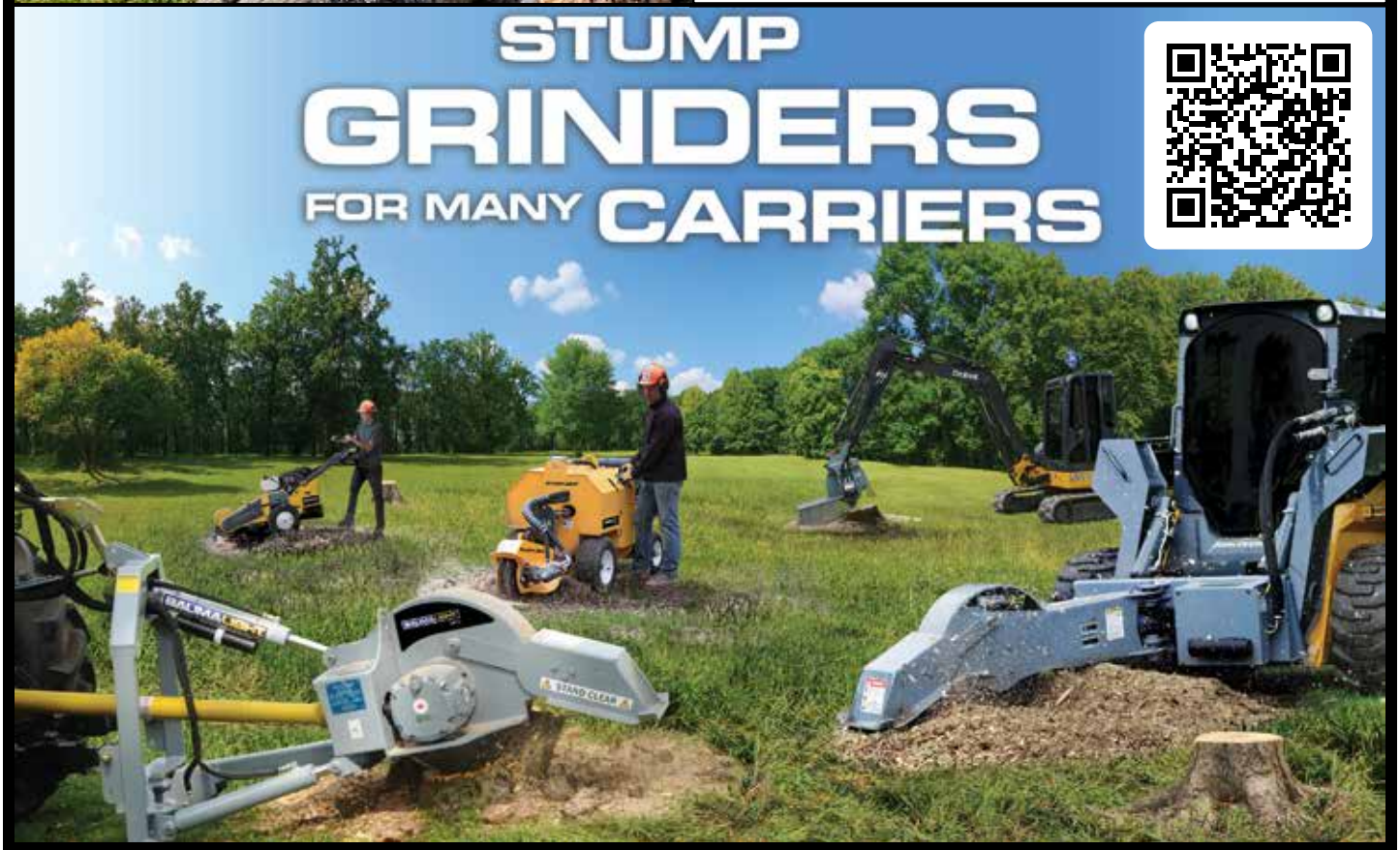

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