

GEM STATE **Producer**

Idaho Farm Bureau
July 2024 • Volume 28 Issue 5

190,000-Square-Foot **Milk Plant** Opens In Idaho




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The buzz around pollinators



June 17-23 was National Pollinator Week, a time dedicated to recognizing and celebrating the tiny heroes who play a massive role in our food supply.

Picture this: a world without fresh strawberries, blueberries, watermelon or crisp apples. Pretty gloomy, right?

Thankfully, we have bees, butterflies and other pollinators who are responsible for the fertilization of many fruits, vegetables and nuts.

A prime example of the importance of pollinators is seen in California's almond industry. Did you know that almond trees are 100% dependent on bee pollination? Without bees, the tree can't produce, and we would lose almonds altogether.

This need for pollinators also goes beyond the almond orchards, as more than 100 crops are dependent on insect pollination. Simply put, without our pollinators, our diets would lack diversity and agricultural yields


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The President's Desk

By Bryan Searle

President, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Farm Bureau gives \$250,000 for meat science research



As with any business, there is a need to be progressive in keeping up with these changing times. This also applies with agriculture.

That's the view that Idaho Farm Bureau Federation board members took recently in deciding to make a significant donation to the University of Idaho's new meat science facility.

The board voted to give \$250,000 to the U of I's new \$14 million facility, which will house the university's meat science program.

It will be known as the Meat Science and

Innovation Center Honoring Ron Richard, the man credited with building that program into what it is today. Richard passed away suddenly several years ago, but his vision remains: The center will facilitate cutting-edge research and spur innovation in the cattle industry.

The 12,750-square-foot facility will be four times larger than the current facility that houses the meat science program and was built six decades ago.


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Inside Farm Bureau

By Zak Miller

CEO, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Lava Ridge Wind Farm – Don't do it!



In August of 2021, a wind energy development was proposed to be sited on public BLM land northeast of Twin Falls from Jerome to Rupert.

This project proposal was HUGE – 400 windmills and some would be the largest ever built (taller than the space needle in Seattle or taller than the Snake River canyon is deep in Twin falls).

This project would cover approximately 197,000 acres of public land. To bring that amount of land into context, if we were to

combine Boise, Meridian, Nampa, Idaho Falls, Caldwell, Pocatello, Coeur d'Alene, Twin Falls, Post Falls, Lewiston and Rexburg into one huge city, those 11 largest cities in Idaho would take up approximately 192,000 acres.

In addition to its size, virtually none of the power generated by this proposed wind farm would stay in Idaho – California is willing to pay more for the power – and the windmills would be very visible at the Minidoka National

See **MILLER**, page 6



Idaho Farm Bureau.

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Printed by: Adams Publishing Group, Pocatello, ID

GEM STATE PRODUCER

USPS #015-024, is published monthly except the four months the Quarterly runs by the IDAHO FARM BUREAU FEDERATION, 275 Tierra Vista Drive, Pocatello, ID 83201.

POSTMASTER send changes of address to: GEM STATE PRODUCER

P.O. Box 4848, Pocatello, ID 83205-4848.

Periodicals postage paid at Pocatello, Idaho, and additional mailing offices.

Subscription rate: \$6.00 per year included in Farm Bureau dues.

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National Hemp Association photos

A hemp plant is shown in this submitted photo.

Idaho hemp acres on pace to double

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Idaho farmers are on track to plant almost twice as many hemp acres as they did last year.

Gem State farmers planted 1,273 acres of hemp in 2023, according to the Idaho State Department of Agriculture. That was up from 459 acres in 2022, the first year that Idaho allowed farmers to grow the regulated crop.

As of May 31, the ISDA has approved licenses to grow 2,440 acres of hemp in the state.

Idaho became the last state in the nation to adopt a hemp program, but it appears at least some Gem State growers are starting to figure out the agronomics of growing the crop here.

Most of Idaho's hemp acres are being grown in southcentral Idaho but hemp is being grown throughout the state.

While a few Idaho growers tried growing hemp for the CBD market in 2022, only one did that in 2023 and no one is growing it for CBD this year.

Of all the hemp acres grown in Idaho in 2022, roughly 44 acres, or around 9.5 percent of all acres, had to be destroyed because they exceeded the legal threshold for THC. All of those acres were planted to CBD hemp varieties. No Idaho hemp acres were destroyed in 2023.

"Fiber varieties seem to grow very well here," said Greg Blahato, who manages the ISDA's hemp program. "The fiber varieties have taken off, and that's what seems to grow very well here."

Apparently, hemp grows well in Idaho's climate. But harvesting it has proven to be a challenge growers are still trying to perfect.

New milk facility in Burley begins production

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BURLEY – Idaho's dairy industry has landed a win with a unique milk-processing facility.

Suntado, a 190,000-square-foot facility, began processing Idaho milk at its Burley plant in mid-May.

"As you are here today, it is go time," Tory Nichols, who works in business development in the office of the CEO of Suntado, told participants of a May 14 tour of the facility.

He said the milk plant is in a "crawl, walk, run mode."

Suntado, a contract manufacturer in dairy and other beverages, teamed up with Tetra Pak, a global food processing and packaging solutions company, on the project.

The state-of-the-art plant will initially process between 800,000 and 1 million pounds of milk per day.

When the facility is fully built out, it is anticipated that it will be able to process between 2-3 million pounds of milk per day, according to Nichols.

The idea for the plant was created in the Jerome airport 37 months ago, Nichols told tour participants.

It is a creation of Idaho dairymen Jesus Hurtado and Dirk Reitsma, who own the facility.

They respectively own 30,000

conventional and 6,000 organic dairy cows within 20 miles of the facility and will be the primary suppliers of milk to their own plant.

Hurtado's dairy produces almost 2 million pounds of milk per day and Reitsma's produces almost 400,000 pounds per day.

Idaho ranks No. 3 nationally in total milk production and there are more than 650,000 milk cows in the state.

"We're excited to see another vertically integrated project come to fruition," said Idaho Dairymen's Association Executive Director Rick Naerebout. "To have additional dairy processing in our area is always welcome for our continuously growing industry."

The Suntado plant is a huge win for Idaho's dairy industry, said Karianne Fallow, CEO of Dairy West, which represents dairy producers in Idaho and Utah.

"This demonstrates the spirit of innovation that we're known for here in our region in agriculture and dairy," she said. "This project is the spirit of that innovation coming to fruition. It defines very well the dairy industry here."

The new facility will be a processor of Class I and Class 2 milk. Class I is fluid milk and Class 2 includes dairy products

such as creamers and heavy whipping cream.

Suntado is teaming up with Tetra Pak to produce a wide variety of aseptic, or shelf-stable, milk products, using both conventional and organic milk.

Many of the products produced there will be packaged in Tetra Pak cartons.

"Shelf-stable products are one of the most exciting ways Tetra Pak is helping to move the beverage industry forward," said Seth Teply, president and CEO of Tetra Pak U.S. and Canada. "With a longer shelf life and no need to refrigerate until opened, shelf-stable dairy products support the transformation of food systems by increasing access to safe food and reducing food waste."

The facility, located on 23 acres of land, will produce ultra-pasteurized shelf-stable milk, extended shelf-life milk, and regular pasteurized milk.

It has the ability to produce a wide variety of dairy-based and other beverages.

"We can make a lot of different things," said Nichols, who added that the plant takes calls from potential new customers every day.

"This vertically integrated facility and our product offerings are completely different than anything out there right now," he said. "I'm energized by the fact that we've built this plant from the ground up, creating a secure, locally sourced milk





Suntado, a 190,000-square-foot facility in Burley, began processing Idaho milk in mid-May. Submitted photos

supply. This facility will offer countless brands the flexibility and scalability they seek”

Suntado officials stressed that the facility is not producing its own brand. It will instead enable retailers and national brands to create private-label beverage products.

“Ultimately, there is big demand for shelf-stable milk, milk in new packaging, new flavors of milk, new formulations, and they’re capitalizing on that demand,” Fallow said. “We know American

consumers are looking for new and exciting products, and this plant is able to offer that.”

“The U.S. dairy industry has a huge role to play in how to be a part of feeding the world,” Teply said. “And we believe that shelf-stable and its extended shelf-life technologies, like what Suntado is ready to launch here, play a key role in that.

We’re super excited and believe Suntado is at the leading edge of a trend that is going to continue for many years in the industry.”

The beverage market has changed dramatically, said Pedro Goncalves, vice president of marketing for Tetra Pak U.S. and Canada.

“Dairy is still the biggest platform to bring innovation to the marketplace,” he said. “That means we will have more diversification in the industry ... We see Suntado as a key player in bringing these types of products to (market).” ■



Continued from page 2

would plummet, affecting food security and economies worldwide.

Fortunately, farmers nationwide are already aware of this vital relationship with pollinators and, for decades now, have been working to create environments where these small but mighty creatures can thrive.

Millions of privately owned farm and ranch acres are enrolled in voluntary federal conservation programs through the farm bill. And beyond that, farmers across the country are committed to finding innovative ways to help boost pollinator habitats.

It's a mutually beneficial relationship where everyone wins – crops flourish, the soil is healthy, and we all get to enjoy a

'From planting pollinator-friendly habitats to implementing conservation practices, there are a variety of great ways farmers are actively working nationwide to create environments that support these essential little workers.'

bounty of fresh and nutritious food.

Take the Midwest, for example, where farmers have ramped up the planting of milkweed to support the population of monarch butterflies. Monarchs rely on milkweed for breeding and as a food source during their long migration from Mexico to Canada.

These conservation practices not only support pollinators, but also enhance soil health and reduce erosion.

Similarly on the west coast, the California Farm Bureau, with the support of their partners, has recently received \$5 million in funding from the California Department of Food and Agriculture to implement climate-smart farming practices and create safe pollinator habitats in citrus groves.

Across the country, farmers are taking on the charge to share the importance of pollinators and ensure they are thriving. One great example of this is Ron Rynders, a beekeeper in Iowa, who is spearheading an effort to bring back native flowers to his

region and ultimately increase pollinator habitats.

Another great example is North Carolina Farm Bureau member Kamal Bell, who not only works as dedicated farmer and beekeeper, but also has created an innovative STEM program, where he educates the next generation about the importance of pollinators in agriculture.

From planting pollinator-friendly habitats to implementing conservation practices, there are a variety of great ways farmers are actively working nationwide to create environments that support these essential little workers.

So, as we celebrate National Pollinator Week, let us recognize the incredible role these creatures play, and the hardworking farmers who work with them to keep our food supply sustainable and our land healthy.

It's a beautiful partnership that makes every bite on our plates a little sweeter. ■



Continued from page 2

Historic Site, one of the camps that Japanese citizens were interned at during World War II.

The environmental impact of such a massive wind farm is a major concern, as it could disrupt local ecosystems and threaten wildlife habitats.

It has been difficult to find many groups or individuals, especially in Idaho, that have endorsed this project; to the contrary, the Lava Ridge Wind Farm project has succeeded in uniting many in their universal opposition to the project.

The public's opposition to the project is widespread and diverse, with concerns ranging from environmental impact to economic implications. This united front against the project underscores the gravity of the situation and the need for everyone's involvement in the opposition.

The Idaho Farm Bureau does not have a formal policy regarding projects such as Lava Ridge. Farm Bureau has always supported multiple use of our public lands and private property rights.

While the Idaho Farm Bureau does not have an official position regarding Lava Ridge, our local county Farm Bureaus in the

'As difficult as these challenges can be and as frustrating as we may feel that the federal government is not listening to its citizens, your voices are needed, especially when it comes to the Lava Ridge Project.'

proposed area have been very vocal in their opposition to this project.

Local Farm Bureaus, county leaders, ranchers, conservationist, state legislators, and members of our congressional delegation have all expressed concerns about this project primarily because few, if any, Idahoans support the project.

The opposition even crosses party lines; both Republican and Democrat leaders have told the BLM, "Don't Do it."

There are many times when it is prudent to give our federal government the benefit of the doubt; however, when it comes to Lava Ridge, this has not been one of those times.

In multiple hearings with Department of the Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, Idaho Sen. James Risch did his best to express his concern and distaste for the project.

Senator Risch admonished her that because this project was so unpopular, the best thing the Department of Interior could do was, "Don't Do it."

You may want to Google "Senator Jim Risch Don't Do It" to fully appreciate the good senator's efforts and the disconnect with Washington bureaucrats on this issue.

Despite Senator Risch's advice, the BLM believes they know better because instead of "Don't Do It," they think they should do most of it.

The BLM has revised its original proposal from 197,000 acres and 400 windmills to 100,000 acres (now it's just the size of the cities of Boise, Meridian, Nampa, and Idaho Falls), and 241 windmills and the windmills will be a smaller 660 feet instead of 740 feet (the tallest building in Idaho is 323 feet tall at 8th and Main in Boise).

Senator Risch again reminded BLM director Tracy Stone-Manning that the state of Idaho had told the federal government, "Don't Do it." (You can view Senator Risch's exchange with Stone-Manning by searching "Risch to BLM director: Lava Ridge is awful management of our public lands.")

The most concerning part from this exchange, in my opinion, is the director's statement that "change is hard."

As difficult as these challenges can be and as frustrating as we may feel that the federal government is not listening to its citizens, your voices are needed, especially when it comes to the Lava Ridge Project.

Please keep speaking up and stay engaged on this issue. ■

SEARLE

Continued from page 2

Groundbreaking on the facility kicked off last fall and the project is expected to be finished in the fall of 2025.

Like the existing one, the new facility will be USDA-inspected and designed in a way to allow research, teaching, production and outreach to occur all under one roof.

All segments of the meat industry will train there.

Great work is being done at the current facility, but the new one will allow the university's meat science program to grow and flourish into the future.

IFBF is excited and happy to partner with the facility, through our donation, and help pave the way for cutting-edge research and innovation in the meat industry.

The innovative work that happens there will benefit our state's vast meat industry, and that will only benefit the men and

'The innovative work that happens there will benefit our state's vast meat industry, and that will only benefit the men and women in Idaho who grow and supply cattle.'

women in Idaho who grow and supply cattle.

When determining what projects or causes to support, the IFBF board of directors looks at whether a project will benefit consumers and, ultimately, our state's agricultural producers.

This new facility at the university will be doing the much-needed and important research on behalf of our state's 22,877 farms and ranches.

The University of Idaho is doing great work on behalf of our agricultural industry and Farm Bureau is committed to helping the university help our industry. It's a privilege to support U of I on a project like this.

There are still more cows than people in Idaho and the cattle industry is extremely important to our state's economy. Idaho cattle producers bring in about \$2 billion in farm-gate revenue each year.

When indirect impacts of cattle are factored in, such as processing, transportation and the feed crops required to feed these animals, it is easily an industry that is worth billions and billions of dollars to Idaho's economy.

The cattle industry is also etched into Idaho's history and way of life and is the backbone of many rural parts of the state.

By supporting this project in a small way, we are ultimately supporting all of Idaho. It is money well spent. ■

Idaho barley assessment rises by half a cent

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Idaho's barley assessment will increase from 3.5 cents per hundredweight (cwt) to 4 cents, beginning July 1.

This assessment is paid by the state's 1,500 barley farmers to fund the Idaho Barley Commission, which funds promotion and market development programs for the crop, as well as research projects important to the industry.

The commission also educates growers about various barley-related issues.

The commission's four members – three farmers and one industry representative – voted June 6 to raise the assessment.

The increase will generate about \$125,000 a year more for the commission, which currently has a budget of \$900,000.

Inflation has caused the cost of virtually everything to increase, in some cases dramatically, and the commission could not continue to fund its current programs, or address additional industry needs, without the increase, said IBC Executive Director Laura Wilder.

"The fact is, the cost for everything has increased and this small assessment increase really is absolutely needed for the commission to best serve Idaho growers," she said.

Idaho Barley Commissioner Mike Wilkins, who farms in Rupert, made the motion to increase the assessment.

"The commission must be proactive on finances to ensure we keep up with the needs of Idaho growers and in advancing the Idaho barley industry," said Wilkins.



Idaho's barley assessment will increase from 3.5 cents per hundredweight to 4 cents.
Idaho Barley Commission photo

"It's a very small increase, yet it's enough to help us do some additional much-needed work."

—Laura Wilder, IBC
executive director

Through our strategic planning process, we've identified research and market development priorities and this boost to the assessment will provide the additional income to invest in these programs to benefit Idaho barley growers."

She said commissioners were very thoughtful about the increase and pointed out the IBC had to cut back about 25 percent this year on its research funding because there simply was not enough money.

During an annual "research review," commissioners are presented possible research projects by scientists, before deciding which ones to fund.

"They weren't able to provide funding for all the good projects that were presented during this year's research review," Wilder said.

Idaho leads the nation in barley pro

duction and Gem State farmers typically produce more than 50 million bushels of barley off of about 550,000 acres annually.

Most of that barley is used as malt during the beer production process and the rest is grown for human food or animal feed.

If total Idaho barley production dropped significantly in a given year due to unforeseen issues, such as bad weather, it would jeopardize many of the IBC's programs that it is statutorily commissioned to do, Wilder said.

The increase works out to less than half a cent per bushel. A bushel of barley equals 48 pounds.

The new assessment of 4 cents per cwt works out to less than 2 cents per bushel.

"It's a very small increase, yet it's enough to help us do some additional much-needed work," Wilder said.

The new 4-cents-per-bushel rate is the highest the commission is authorized to assess per state statute.

Idaho's barley farmers formed the IBC in 1988 to help promote their industry and the commission started with an assessment fee of 2 cents per 100 pounds of production.

The assessment was raised from 2 cents to 3 cents in 2013 and it was raised to 3.5 cents last year. ■

U of I program celebrates 30 years of remote learning

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

MOSCOW, Idaho — The internet was in its infancy, VHS tapes were considered modern technology and working remotely wasn't a thing when University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS) first launched a distance bachelor's degree in agriculture.

Virtual programs and remote courses have become prevalent following the COVID-19 pandemic. In the fall semester of 1994 when CALS welcomed its first distance agriculture class, however, the idea of studying with teachers and classmates from hundreds of miles away was trailblazing.

In its 30 years, the program has provided flexibility for non-traditional students working in the Magic and Treasure valleys — and beyond — to tap expertise from U of I's Moscow campus and earn a bachelor's degree without having to quit a job or leave home.

The program has helped 268 students working remotely earn degrees, including five graduates on May 11.

"As a land-grant university, part of our mission is to reach the stakeholders across the state," said Amanda Moore-Kriwox, academic coordinator for a distance degree in agriculture.

The distance degree program, which is offered through the Department of Agricultural Education, Leadership and Communications, started two years after the Twin Falls Research and Extension Center opened on the College of Southern Idaho (CSI) campus.

It's designed as a two-plus-two program, seamlessly building upon an associate degree from CSI or the College of Western Idaho in Nampa. Students can tailor the program to the CALS subject matter of their choosing, selecting up to three interest areas from the various agricultural departments and family and consumer sciences.

Initially the distance program offered a general agriculture major, which eventually changed to agricultural science and technology. The program currently offers a degree in agricultural science, communication and leadership.

"The industry wanted students to have communication and leadership skills to work on teams and work well with others," Moore-Kriwox said.

In the program's early days, students would take classes from a room on the CSI campus equipped with large cameras. Professor Benton Glaze taught a course on the genetics of livestock improvement in that classroom, enabling students on the Moscow campus to watch the video feed.

Most courses, however, were taught in Moscow, with a video feed sent to the students at the CSI campus. Lectures were also recorded on VHS for students to watch in the Magic Valley. Nowadays, lectures are recorded on Zoom and posted on the university's online learning management system, Canvas.

The degree prepares graduates to work in a host of jobs, such as



Photo courtesy of Emerson Kemper
Emerson Kemper, a graduate of University of Idaho's distance bachelor's degree in agriculture, works in the lab at Boviteq in Jerome.

agricultural communications, natural resources agencies, agricultural businesses, Extension, marketing and others. The class requires students to complete an internship in the agricultural industry.

Opportunities for internships abound in the Magic Valley, which Moore-Kriwox described as the Silicon Valley of agribusiness.

Emerson Kemper, who was among the program's recent graduates, is coordinator of an in-vitro fertilization lab specializing in high-end dairy and beef genetics based in Jerome, called Boviteq. Kemper also works part-time at the U of I Research and Extension Center in Twin Falls.

Kemper held associate degrees in health science and agribusiness prior to enrolling in the U of I distance bachelor's program.

"It's definitely a great opportunity to get an education while also pursuing a career or starting one," said Kemper, who specialized in animal science courses. "It also lined up really well with CSI and the credits I already had. They make it super flexible, and the professors were always reaching out and seeing if I needed help." ■



Water exits a spillway at Lower Granite Dam in June 2021.

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation photos

Columbia River litigation: Where are we now?

By Paul Arrington, Stacey Satterlee and Will Hart

If you've followed the longstanding litigation challenging operation of eight federal dams on the lower Columbia and Snake rivers, you've no doubt heard about the "Federal Commitments Document," which outlines a series of studies and expenditures by the federal agencies over the next 10 years.

Chances are, with all the back-and-forth about these commitments, you are wondering, "what is going on?" Do these commitments get us closer to breaching the dams on the lower Snake River?

Frankly, even for those of us who work these issues every day, it can be quite confusing.

In this article, we will attempt to unwind the confusion and provide some clarity on the situation (to the extent there is any).

The federal government, states, tribes and stakeholders have been embroiled in a cycle of litigation for decades. Like a broken record, the song just seems to keep playing in the following sequence:

- Step 1: The federal agencies issue biological opinions (BiOps) and environmental review (EIS) documents approving operations of the dams;
- Step 2: Certain groups, including Oregon, Washington, several tribes and conservation groups, challenge the federal agencies' decisions in the Federal District Court in Oregon;
- Step 3: The court rejects the federal agencies' decisions and remands (i.e. returns) the process back to the federal agencies to redo their analysis.
- Step 4: Repeat Steps 1-3.

This process has played out at least four times over the last two decades, with each round leading to the same result: more litigation.

In 2020, the federal agencies released their latest BiOp and EIS. As with prior decisions, these were immediately challenged in court.

It appeared, at first glance, that this litigation might play out the same as prior rounds.

However, this time, something different happened; the Biden Administration chose to engage in the matter.

Initial efforts were led by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), an office embedded within the executive office of the president that coordinates the federal government's efforts regarding public health and the environment.

Subsequently, CEQ engaged the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS) to assist.

In July 2021, the parties agreed to stay (i.e. pause) the litigation so that they could attempt to negotiate a long-term resolution. The stay was ultimately extended and ran through Dec. 15, 2023.

During the stay, those who were parties to the litigation were engaged in a mediation process. There were several concerns about this mediation process.

First, those who were not directly involved in the litigation, like the Idaho Water Users Association, Idaho Consumer-Owned Utilities Association, and Idaho Grain Producers Association, were not included in the mediation efforts.

Further, parties that support the river system, including the dams and fisheries, were often left out of substantive conversations about possible solutions and paths forward and were given inadequate time to respond to substantive proposals.

On Dec. 13, 2023, a group of plaintiffs, joined by the federal government, announced that they had reached an agreement to: (1) extend the stay for an additional five years; and (2) engage in a list of actions, outlined in the "Federal Commitments Document" (FCD).

The stay was granted, meaning that the litigation is on hold until January 2029.

So, what exactly does this Federal Commitments Document do? Does it require



Idaho Farm Bureau members tour Lower Granite Dam in 2021.

that the dams on the lower Snake River (the LSRD) be breached? Will it impact navigation or hydropower generation on the federal system?

Frustratingly, there are many questions that cannot be answered at this time. Here is what we do know. The FCD:

- Recognizes that only Congress is vested with the authority to breach the LSRD. However, the actions required by the FCD are intended to replace or mitigate the services from the LSRD in preparation for an eventual decision by Congress to breach.
- Creates a "Pacific Northwest Tribal Energy Program" to provide the region's tribes with "energy sovereignty." This includes assistance in the development of tribal energy resources that will be used or sold by the tribes. While the document includes this provision, there is little to no detail or additional information on what this energy program will look like.
- Directs funds for studies of the region's energy supply needs and possibilities for replacement power, transportation, recreation, and water supply, and a study to replace or mitigate those services "should

Congress authorize dam breach."

These studies are in their early stages and are expected to be completed by early 2025.

- Commits an additional \$300 million in electric customer funds through the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) to support salmon recovery efforts. Due to this financial commitment and the uncertainties listed above, the Public Power Council has estimated that power rates could increase 5% to 40% over the next 10 years.

With all the confusion in this process, one thing is for certain: the need to stay engaged on this issue has never been stronger.

Idaho relies on the services provided by this infrastructure. Whether it be low-cost, reliable, and on-demand hydropower or low-carbon emission, low-cost, reliable access to world markets, our communities and industries need these systems. ■

Paul Arrington is executive director of the Idaho Water Users Association, Stacey Satterlee is executive director of the Idaho Grain Producers Association, and Will Hart is executive director of the Idaho Consumer-Owned Utilities Association.

Producers try out soil moisture beacons with \$35,000 grant

By Steve Stuebner
Conservation the Idaho Way

The Wood River and Gooding Soil Conservation districts received a \$34,650 grant from the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission under the state Water Quality Program for Agriculture (WQPA) to install soil moisture beacons in farm fields and see if the devices help producers conserve water and improve water quality.

The districts got 14 farmers to engage in this precision agriculture best practice in 2023 by placing a total of 70 beacons in a variety of crop fields to assist in their decisions on when to irrigate crops, how much water to use, when to harvest, and potentially conserve water over the course of the summer irrigation season.

Farmers in the two districts had heard positive feedback from sugar beet growers in Southern Idaho who have tried the soil moisture beacons from Soiltech Wireless. They wanted to see how the beacons might assist growers in raising other crops like alfalfa hay, corn and oats.

“We wanted to get a bunch of the (beacons) out in the fields and see how they could help our producers, and I think we were successful in that,” said Carl Pendleton, Wood River Soil Conservation District chairman who farms in the Shoshone area. “Water management and water conservation are important to us as a district, no matter what the crop, so we wanted to try them out.”

Experts say the soil moisture beacons have the upside potential to save up to two or three pivot rotations for producers during an irrigation season. Each pivot rotation would consume approximately 2.8 million gallons of water over a 48-hour period in a 130-acre field, officials said, so the water savings could be substantial.

The WQPA grant project investment in the Soiltech Wireless beacons provided five beacons each to the participating farmers to assist in their watering decisions while growing a variety of crops in different types of soil.



A Soiltech Wireless soil moisture beacon is inserted into the top profile of the soil. Photos courtesy of Soiltech Wireless

The beacons cost about \$500 each. A \$99 per year subscription is required to use a Soiltech Wireless app that gives producers real-time data on soil temperature, soil moisture and humidity in their crop fields on a smart phone, tablet or computer.

“That gives the landowners the ability to make real-time informed decisions about their current watering situations,” said Barbara Messick, administrator for the Wood River and Gooding soil conservation districts.

Within the past few years, the main conservation practice in the districts has been converting irrigation systems from flood to sprinkler irrigation.

With a reduced need for sprinkler conversions, the soil beacons could be used in combination with more efficient pivot sprinklers to further improve water management practices, Messick said.

The project covered roughly 560 acres in the two districts. By using the soil moisture beacons to track soil moisture during the irrigation season, there is potential for the producers to not only save water but also improve water quality, she said.

Several major streams that run through the project area are on the list of water quality impaired waters, according to the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality.

In addition, portions of both Lincoln and Gooding counties are underlain by groundwater used as a source for private and public drinking water.

The participating farms also overlay the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA), which has been in general decline for more than 70 years.

The Idaho Department of Water Resources is working with irrigation interests on a new management plan for the ESPA to reduce groundwater pumping and find a long-term solution to rebuild the aquifer to sustainable levels.

“The ESPA is in decline, and groundwater users are at risk of water calls from surface water entities if conservation efforts are insufficient to mitigate declining groundwater and surface water resources,” Messick said. “Irrigation water management is a critical practice in protecting groundwater quality and quantity. It can prevent nutrients from leaching off of fields and into drinking water sources.”

She noted that there is a nitrate priority area in Gooding County due to groundwater concerns.

“Irrigation water management can also prevent over-watering of crops; this is particularly important for fields irrigated with well water,” Messick said. “Surface water quality can also benefit from irrigation water management. Making more efficient use of irrigation water can prevent field runoff and irrigation return flows into canals and other water bodies, thus keeping sediment, nutrients, and pathogens out of surface water.”

The Soiltech Wireless beacons were developed by working together with a number of sugar beet and potato farmers in Southern Idaho, said Ehsan Soltan, founder and CEO of Soiltech Wireless.

The Soiltech web site says that on a 10,000-acre potato farm, there is the potential for saving 500 million gallons of water, 250,000 gallons of fuel, and a 4 percent increase in yield by using the soil beacons.



Photo courtesy of Barbara Messick

Tim Silvers of Soiltech installs a unit in a corn field with Robert Lezamiz.

With the beacons placed in the top profile in crop fields, farmers don't have to check the fields manually as often as they might otherwise, saving time and fuel, company officials said.

“The beacons can help a producer decide when to irrigate and how much water to apply, as well as when to plant or harvest,” Soltan said.

“We built the devices with the help of Idaho growers, who were looking for more data and real-time information on soil moisture in their fields,” he said. “The growers are the ultimate users of the product. We can learn from their experience and fine-tune our water management.”

The soil moisture information is conveyed by the beacons as a percentage, Soltan said. Readings may show a range of 60 to 90 percent – with 60 on the dry side and 90 on the wet side.

“If you're in the 90th percentile, you're reaching the field's capacity,” he said.

From years of experience, farmers generally know their soil types and how much irrigation water to use to grow a successful crop. But the devices can help producers be more precise in their water use.

The beacons provide a constant stream of data from farm fields, with new data provided every four hours, Soltan said.

Aaron Firth, an agronomist for Amalgamated Sugar who serves producers in the Mini-Cassia area in Southern Idaho, said they

had 12 sugar beet farmers try out the Soiltech Wireless beacons. “Overall, they work really well,” he said. “You do have to have some tech savvy to calibrate the beacons to your soil type and your crop.”

Potential water savings

By paying close attention to the irrigation water needed for crops, producers could save significant amounts of water, Firth said.

One pivot irrigating a 130-acre farm field consumes 1,000 gallons of water per minute, or 60,000 gallons per hour, he said. If the farmer runs the pivot for 48 hours at a time, he would use 2.8 million gallons of water.

If the beacons allow a farmer to save two or three pivot rotations in an irrigation season, that could equate to more than 5.6 to 8.4 million gallons of water, or 17-25 acre-feet of water. One acre-foot of water equals one acre of land flooded to the depth of one foot.

Hearing about the potential water savings is what convinced the Wood and Gooding soil districts to give the beacons a try, company officials said.

“It still doesn’t replace going out to check on a field with a shovel,” said Daniel Butler, owner of Spring Cove Ranch in Bliss and a Gooding district supervisor. “But we wanted to see if we could help our landowners do some water conservation.”

Butler installed four of his soil beacons in corn fields and one in an alfalfa field. Once the WQPA grant funds came through, the beacons were installed in July 2023, later than normal, but the district producers will have a full year of experience with the beacons in 2024, he said.

Nearly all of the producers said they had issues with rodents or other wildlife chewing on the beacon antennas and causing them to malfunction. The antennas can be covered with a protective cover to avoid that issue, Soltan said.

Farmers also had trouble finding the beacons after crops grew to maturity. “After the corn was 10 feet tall, I couldn’t find the units,” Pendleton said. “There was just some odd-ball stuff like that to learn.”

Putting a stake in the ground next to a buried beacon helps locate them in crop fields, Soltan said.



TOP: The beacons transmit soil moisture, humidity, soil temperature and other data digitally to a smart phone, tablet or computer. An annual subscription is necessary to receive data. Photo courtesy of Soiltech Wireless

ABOVE: Ehsan Soltan, CEO of Soiltech, gives local producers Mike Elliot, Garrett Lott, Daniel Butler (all sitting) and Carl Pendleton a demonstration of the information provided by the soil beacons in real-time. Photo courtesy of Barbara Messick

“We are learning as we go, and that’s OK,” Butler said. “We wanted people to try them and have them share their experience. We’ve already had one meeting like that, and we’ll have some more. Next year, we’ll use them for a full season and see how that goes.”

Both Pendleton and Butler said the Soiltech devices can provide more information than they know how to tap into so

far, but they’ll learn more as their experience grows over time.

“I’m not that tech savvy, but I think we’ll learn more how to tap into their potential as time goes on,” Pendleton said. “Sometimes you need to get your feet on the ground and go from there.”

For more information about Soiltech Wireless, go to soiltechwireless.com. ■

Steve Stuebner writes for Conservation the Idaho Way on a regular basis.

About 379,000 acre-feet of water recharged into aquifer

By Steve Stuebner

Idaho Department of Water Resources

BOISE – The Idaho Water Resource Board in early June was finalizing multi-pronged efforts over the winter of 2023-24 to send Snake River surface water flows into the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer to help restore the aquifer to sustainable water levels.

The board relied on a record number of new and existing aquifer-recharge sites throughout the Eastern Snake Plan Aquifer region to boost recharge flows, officials said.

“Once the water turned on in the Upper Snake, we’ve really been able to crank up the recharge flows,” said Wesley Hipke, ESPA recharge program manager for the board. “Big picture, it was nice to not only hit our recharge goal this year, but also exceed it with a record number of recharge sites being utilized throughout the basin.”

In late March, when the Bureau of Reclamation and Army Corps of Engineers were releasing flood-control flows out of Upper Snake reservoirs, recharge flows increased to 4,000 cubic feet per second per day, allowing the board to turn on 12 different recharge sites above American Falls Reservoir, Hipke said. Once irrigation deliveries started, the capacity for recharge was reduced but recharge continued until May 29.

Overall ESPA recharge flows occurred for 230 days at 18 sites, with an average flow of 901 cfs, Hipke said.

Summary for the IWRB 2023/2024 recharge season:

- Started natural flow aquifer-recharge on Oct 28. Ended natural flow recharge on May 29.
- The total natural flow recharge volume is estimated to be 379,081 acre-feet of water for the winter 2023-24 season.

How does the aquifer-recharge program work?

The board partners with irrigation districts and canal companies in the ESPA region to run Snake River surface water into canals to reach aquifer-recharge basins, where the water sinks into the aquifer.

The board has an existing water right for the purpose of ESPA recharge, which comes into play after the end of the irrigation season.

Besides the board’s natural flow recharge program, staff assisted the cites, Surface Water Coalition (SWC), Idaho Ground Water Appropriators and other entities to recharge more than 90,000 acre-feet of water into the ESPA as part of the SWC settlement agreements. This recharge occurred between Oct. 6 and Nov. 15.

Other program highlights:

- Due to increased recharge capacity developed by the board and its partners, a new maximum recharge diversion rate of more than 4,000 cfs occurred during peak flows in March and April.



Submitted photo

Water flows into a recharge site.

- The board had minimal flows for much of the winter season – about 500 cfs. Increased flood-control releases started on March 22, providing increased water for recharge and allowing for aquifer-recharge in the Upper Snake region, above American Falls Reservoir.
- The board utilized the Big and Little Wood river flows for aquifer recharge between Feb. 22 and May 10.
- Two new recharge facilities that were utilized this year include New Sweden, Idaho’s Basalt and the Enterprize Canal Co.’s 55th Road recharge sites.
- The board has two other sites being constructed near the South Fork Snake River that are scheduled to be completed by next winter.
- Board staff are working with numerous entities in the Upper Valley to develop more recharge sites.

For more information about the board’s ESPA recharge program, go to: <https://iwrbrecharge-idwr.hub.arcgis.com/>. ■

HEMP

Continued from page 3

“From the regulatory side, we didn’t see any issues with the crop last year,” said Casey Monn, ISDA’s hemp bureau chief. “Some folks were able to grow and harvest it very, very well and there were some folks that seemed to struggle with growing and harvesting it.”

He said Idaho hemp growers did have a lot of issues with the crop not drying enough and being too green or wet during harvest time.

Idaho became the last state in the nation to legalize the production and processing of industrial hemp. The bill passed in the Idaho Senate by a vote of 30-5 and in the House by a vote of 44-26. Gov. Brad Little signed House Bill 126 into law in April 2021.

The legislation is a narrow bill and only allows for people to grow and process industrial hemp if they obtain a license from the ISDA. People can also transport it on behalf of someone with a license.

Industrial hemp, by federal law, must not exceed 0.3 percent of THC, the psychoactive compound that gets a user of marijuana high. According to experts, it is impossible to get high from industrial hemp.

Idaho’s hemp program, as required by federal law, has safeguards to ensure hemp grown in the state does not exceed that 0.3 percent THC threshold.

Industrial hemp products have always been sold legally in the United States but not until the 2018 farm bill was passed was it legal to grow and process hemp commercially in the U.S.

The hemp products sold in the U.S. previously came from other countries.

According to Monn, Idaho has the strictest hemp program in the United States. Hemp is regulated in Idaho by the lot, not by the grower.

Every planted hemp lot has to be inspected at least once. If someone harvests all their hemp from a lot at once, there is one inspection. If there are several harvests of one plot, there will need to be several inspections.

If there is a compliance issue, a grower can opt to try remediation efforts and ISDA inspectors will inspect the hemp again once those efforts are undertaken.

RIGHT: A hemp plant is shown in this submitted photo. Idaho farmers are on pace to grow twice as many acres of hemp in 2024 as they did in 2023.



“There are a lot of variables the grower has to be aware of,” Monn said.

Although hemp acres have basically doubled in Idaho this year, the crop has a long way to go to catch the state’s major crops.

For example, Idaho farmers grow about 1 million acres of wheat, more than 1 million acres of hay, 500,000 acres of barley, 350,000 acres of corn and about 300,000 acres of potatoes each year.

For now, it can be considered a burgeoning crop and growers are starting to figure out the agronomics of growing it in Idaho.

For some farmers, like Brad Darrington of Declo, it doesn’t appear that hemp will work out economically. He grew it last year but will not grow it this year.

“Why would I continue growing it if” it’s not going to pencil out for me, he said.

Madison County grower Brigham Cook grew almost 100 acres of hemp last year and will grow about the same amount this year.

“I think there’s a future for hemp and hopefully there is a future for hemp in

Idaho,” he said. “There are a lot of potential uses for hemp that I believe will be a win for farmers who grow it.”

However, he added, there have been challenges in harvesting the crop.

“The harvest has been a huge issue,” Cook said. “It’s a new enough crop here that we just haven’t figured out all the quirks.”

He said hemp has been a pretty good help for weed control.

“It’s a crop that fits ... in this part of Idaho and should be a good crop rotation for us,” Cook said.

Roberts farmer Triston Sponseller, believed to be the state’s largest hemp grower last year, also owns the Idaho Hemp Processing facility in Rexburg. The company, which processes industrial hemp, contracts with growers throughout a wide swath of the state, from Jerome to Rexburg, out toward Arco and north of Arco toward Mackay.

“Harvesting has been a challenge,” Sponseller said. “It’s definitely been a tough crop compared to what we’re used to. It’s been

a learning experience and there has been some trial and error.”

Sponseller said he’s been told by numerous agronomists, including in other states, that Idaho has ideal growing conditions for hemp.

“A lot of hemp companies are eyeing the state real hard,” he said.

Sponseller rotates hemp with wheat, barley and potatoes.

“The potato guys we’ve been working with really like how it fits into a rotation with potatoes,” he said.

Though the crop is new and Idaho farmers are still trying to learn the different agronomic quirks involved with producing it, at least Gem State growers are now in the game, said Braden Jensen, director of governmental affairs for Idaho Farm Bureau Federation.

“Idaho’s agriculture industry is extremely knowledgeable and innovative,” he said.

“Our growers will figure out whether it’s an economically viable crop in our state.” ■

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*You’re automatically entered into our \$500 drawing when you refer a friend, even if they don’t purchase a policy. Visit: www.idahofarmbureauinsurance.com/about-us/refer-a-friend/ for complete rules and restrictions. Above left: Carmen Izaguirre from Gannett, Idaho, the winner of our 3rd quarter 2023 Refer A Friend, Get A Gift \$500 drawing.

Commodity checkoffs: More than a milk moustache

By **Bernt Nelson and Betty Resnick**

American Farm Bureau Federation economists

National advertising campaigns asking if you've "Got Milk?" or telling you "Beef. It's What's for Dinner" generated a lot of buzz – and sales of dairy and beef, respectively.

Though they may be some of the most recognized initiatives from industry checkoffs, the work of these programs representing agricultural products ranging from dairy and beef to peanuts, popcorn, paper and Christmas trees, have been a catalyst for innovation across numerous commodities.

In this Market Intel, we'll explore the history of checkoffs and their role in promoting agriculture.

Research and promotion programs

The best-known checkoff programs are research and promotion (R&P) programs, run by R&P boards with a mission to maintain and expand markets for a specific commodity.

Originally, these programs existed on a voluntary basis; farmers and ranchers had the option to check a box when they sold a product that gave part of their revenue to research and promotion of the commodity, hence the term "checkoff."

As these programs grew, a classic free-rider problem developed as farmers and ranchers who did not contribute to checkoffs were still receiving all the benefits to the industry that checkoffs provided.

Federal R&P programs became a solution to this issue. Today, there are 22 active R&P programs.

Of the 22 active R&P programs, 10 are authorized under the Commodity Promotion, Research, and Information Act of 1996. The other programs are authorized under commodity-specific federal legislation.

The oldest federal R&P program is the Cotton Board, which was established in 1966 to reestablish markets for cotton as synthetic fabrics were beginning to replace cotton fabric. Today, all producers of cotton are assessed at \$1 per bale and 0.5% of the value of the cotton bale.

Cotton importers are also assessed a comparable amount based on the weight of cotton or cotton products imported. In addition to promotion efforts such as The Seal of Cotton™, a logo that has been around since 1973 and is one of the most recognized logos in the country, the Cotton Board has sponsored pioneering research that led to the cotton module builder, which builds the large compact bales you'll see in cotton country at harvest.

The Cotton Board also supported research that has made cottonseed a popular and effective feed for cattle. With this research, cottonseed has gone from an unwanted byproduct to an increasingly important part of the crop's value.

R&P program rules

R&P programs are self-funded by the industry. USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service provides oversight for the programs to ensure fiscal accountability and program integrity. The programs

reimburse AMS for the oversight through industry assessments, so no taxpayer dollars are used to fund the oversight of R&P programs.

All R&P programs are required to exempt organic products from assessment requirements. Additionally, a majority of R&P programs provide assessment exemptions to small producers and small importers, the definition of which is different for each commodity program.

All R&P programs carry out their mission to maintain and expand markets for their specific commodity through research and development, domestic and international promotion, and consumer and industry education.

They are explicitly banned from using assessment or "checkoff" funding for lobbying or to promote specific brands. Instead, the R&P programs must focus on promoting the sector as a whole, including imports, if importers are also assessed.

For example, the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council (USHBC) does not promote exclusively U.S.-grown blueberries as an assessment is also placed on imported blueberries. Instead, USHBC promotes blueberries broadly with the goal of making them the most consumed berry worldwide.

Since the council's inception in 2000, domestic blueberry consumption and production have skyrocketed. Between 2000-2002 and 2018-2020, average per capita blueberry consumption grew to 2.2 pounds per person – an increase of 574%.

The increase in consumption is fueled by both an increase in domestic production (+283% to 343 million pounds) and an increase in imports (+919% to 450 million pounds).

All R&P programs undergo independent annual audits, and are subject to referendum, though the referendum rules vary by commodity. Referendums take place to establish a new R&P program and to affirm continuation of existing R&P programs.

All R&P programs authorized under the Commodity Promotion, Research, and Information Act of 1996 are required to hold a referendum every five years. Others, authorized under previous legislation, are subject to their own rules for referendum.

The most recent referendum was held for the National Peanut Board in April 2024, and passed with 93% of peanut producers voting to continue the program.

The United Soybean Board requires AMS to conduct a request for referendum every five years and recently conducted a request for referendum between May 6 and May 31.

For a referendum to be requested, 10% of all soybean growers (41,336 in total) would need to return a completed form to their county Farm Service Agency office by May 31. No more than 20% of total petitions may be from the same state. While results of the 2024 request for referendum are not yet public, when it was last held in 2019, only 703 total requests were received, representing only 0.13% of all eligible soybean farmers.

The Beef Promotion and Research Order, established by the 1985 farm bill and approved by national referendum vote in 1988, authorizes the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board.

Federal Marketing Orders – FVSC

Almonds (CA)	Olives (CA)	Potatoes
Avocados (South Florida)	Onions	Idaho-Eastern Oregon*
Cherries	Idaho-Eastern Oregon	Colorado (partial)
Sweet (Parts of WA)	South Texas	Raisins (CA)
Tart (MI, NY, PA, OR, UT, WA, and WI)	Vidalia (South GA)	Spearmint Oil (WA, ID, OR, parts of NV, UT)
Citrus	Walla Walla (Parts of WA, OR)	Tomatoes (FL, excluding panhandle)
Florida (excluding panhandle)	Pears (OR and WA)	Walnuts (CA)
Texas (Lower Rio Grande Valley)	Pecans (AL, AR, AZ, CA, FL, GA, KS, LA, MO, MS, NC, NM, OK, SC, and TX)	Recently Terminated: Cranberries, Apricots, Washington Potatoes
Dates (Riverside Co., CA)	Pistachios (CA, AZ, and NM)*	
Grapes (South CA)	Dried Prunes (CA)	
Hazelnuts (OR and WA)		
Kiwifruit (CA)		

 American Farm Bureau Federation

**Do not have research & promotion authority
Source: USDA AMS*

The program requires a referendum only if a representative group comprising 10% or more of total cattle producers signs a petition for referendum within a 12-month period. A petition for referendum was launched on July 2, 2020, and ultimately failed to validate the 88,269 signatures required at the time.

According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, there were 732,123 farms producing cattle at the time of the census, so future petitions would require at least 73,212 signatures to conduct a referendum.

How is money spent?

Money from R&P programs can be used in a variety of ways. Typically, it is spent on research, promotion or education to build demand and expand markets for each respective commodity.

For example, the purpose of the Cattlemen's Beef Board is to “stimulate beef sales and consumption through a combination of initiatives including consumer advertising, research, public relations and new-product development.”

Traditionally, these programs used advertising as one of the pillars of programming, but as the cost of advertising has increased, spending has moved toward scientific research and education.

R&P programs use money for various aspects of research by funding projects and publishing their results. Some of these projects are done through universities or Extension in the land-grant university system. Others may be done in collaboration with industry partners.

One example of R&P research is that conducted by the National Dairy Promotion and Research board, more commonly known as the “Dairy Checkoff.” The Dairy Checkoff conducted scientific research that has led to the reevaluation of the nutritional benefits of animal fats.

The results of this research are then used to educate the public

and stimulate demand for nutritional dairy products such as milk and cheese.

In another example, the National Peanut Board invested research on addressing peanut allergies.

Checkoffs promote products both at home and abroad. The U.S. Meat Export Federation is a trade association largely funded by a coalition of checkoffs including those for the pork, beef, lamb, soybean and corn industries.

USMEF has offices throughout the world to boost exports of U.S. red meat by connecting buyers and sellers, working on market access for U.S. products, and marketing in foreign markets.

A variety of tactics are used for in-country promotion: from helping a Korean food chain transition to using 100% U.S. beef, to creating culturally relevant recipes for underutilized cuts of meat, to teaming up with local food influencers to educate the public on cooking techniques to maximize pork flavor.

Federal marketing orders

Federal marketing orders were established under the Agricultural Marketing Agreement Act of 1937 to establish minimum standards of quality, maintain grading and inspection requirements and, in rare instances, manage supply.

Many federal marketing orders, including nearly all the orders regulating the marketing of fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops, also have research and promotion functions like the R&P-only programs.

Both take the form of orders that must be voted for by producers and both are administered by USDA, funded by a per-unit fee imposed when the product covered by the order is sold, and can be considered “self-help” programs for the industry.

They must be initially approved by a majority of producers of a specific commodity and re-approved every five years through a

Research and Promotion Programs - 2024

1966 - Cotton Board
1972 - National Potato Promotion Board
1976 - American Egg Board
1984 - National Dairy Promotion & Research Board
1986 - Cattleman's Beef Promotion and Research Board
1986 - National Pork Board
1989 - National Watermelon Promotion Board
1991 - United Soybean Board
1993 - National Fluid Milk Processor Promotion Board
1993 - Mushroom Council

1997 - Popcorn Board
2000 - Highbush Blueberry Council
2000 - National Peanut Board
2002 - American Lamb Board
2002 - Haas Avocado Board
2004 - National Mango Board
2008 - National Honey Board
2008 - United Sorghum Board
2011 - Softwood Lumber Board
2014 - Christmas Tree Promotion Board
2014 - Paper & Packaging Board
2021 - American Pecan Promotion Board



Source: USDA AMS

referendum. The only two federal marketing orders for specialty crops without a research and promotion component are potatoes and pistachios, which both focus on quality regulation.

Marketing orders are binding regulations for an entire industry in a specific geographic region. There are currently 25 federal marketing orders for fruits, vegetables and specialty crops.

Voting

R&P programs and federal marketing orders are both subject to referendum, through which farmers and program members can influence what checkoff dollars get used. However, voting can be conducted differently for different R&P programs and federal marketing orders.

Dairy, for example, is an industry with a high rate of cooperative membership. The Dairy Checkoff uses a system called modified bloc voting. Under this system, when changes are proposed, a cooperative may bloc vote on behalf of its members.

If it does, it must notify its members that the cooperative intends to cast a bloc vote ballot. If any producer wishes to cast a ballot individually, the cooperative must inform the producer of procedures to cast an individual and confidential ballot.

The cooperative may then vote on behalf of all members who have not opted to cast an individual ballot. This allows freedom for individual producers to have their vote counted and their voice heard, but respects many farmers' decision to make marketing decisions through their cooperative association.

State checkoffs and marketing orders

Several states maintain similar programs, often referred to as commodity boards or commissions. State programs layer assessments on top of those established by federal entities and provide more localized research and marketing.

For instance, state checkoffs can better focus research on pests

or climate particular to a single state. For some products that predominantly grow in only one state, like table grapes, a state commission is the main checkoff program for that commodity.

In this instance, the California Table Grape Commission maintains and expands markets for fresh California grapes both domestically and abroad. Often state-level programs also have a focus on data collection.

Summary and conclusions

R&P programs and the research and promotion elements of federal marketing orders, commonly known as "checkoff" programs, operate by taking a small assessment from the sale of each unit of a given commodity to fund research and promotion of the commodity as a whole.

AMS oversees the programs for accountability and integrity.

Legally, messages delivered by R&P entities are protected government speech and not all stakeholders may agree with the messages these programs deliver, or even the fact that they exist.

The members of the boards that run these programs are not elected; although they must be nominated by producer (or importer) organizations, they are chosen by the secretary of agriculture.

Farmers can only have direct democratic influence by voting to create, continue or terminate a research and promotion program or a marketing order, or to approve or disapprove changes in assessment rates.

Despite some controversy, most checkoffs have overwhelming support from commodity producers and continue to support a variety of research and promotion efforts that help maintain and expand both domestic and global markets for the livestock and crops our country's farmers produce. ■

U of I workshop teaches stream restoration

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

MOSCOW, Idaho – A University of Idaho-led workshop is helping Idaho landowners transform eroding ditches running through their properties into scenic, riparian corridors that support a diversity of wildlife while capturing and storing water for agricultural use.

It was common practice in the late-1800s for Idaho landowners to straighten streams meandering through their valleys. Channelizing streams made farming easier but resulted in fast-moving flows cutting deeper and wider, drying the water table beneath adjacent marshland.

To remedy mistakes of the past, UI Extension forestry and water outreach programs have partnered with scientists and representatives from local agencies and nonprofits to offer a stream restoration workshop.

The workshop, which has now been administered to more than 240 participants in five panhandle counties, plus Latah County, includes a half day of classroom training followed by field trips to stream reaches in various stages of restoration.

A survey of participants of past workshops found 83% intended to regularly monitor their stream health based on what they learned, 78% intended to implement actions to improve the health of one or more streams and 69% planned to work with professionals on stream restoration.

When streams are free to form natural bends and pools, water moves slower and with less erosive force, allowing it to deposit sediment and percolate into the soil, supplementing surrounding shallow water tables.

Hay and other crops planted along healthy riparian corridors benefit from the moist soils.

“Nowadays, we’re starting to try to slow that water back down again,” said Jim Ekins, UI Extension area water educator, who



Photo courtesy of Jim Ekins

Participants in a University of Idaho Extension stream restoration workshop visit the site of past improvements to a stream in north Idaho.

has run the program since 2018. “These valleys are drying out. Wells within them are drying out, and farmers are not getting a second cutting of hay.”

Organizers have set a goal of conducting at least one workshop in every northern Idaho county, with plans to host them in Clearwater and Benewah counties in 2024.

They’re also willing to host workshops in other regions of the state where there’s interest.

Chris Schnepf, a UI Extension area educator specializing in forestry, started the workshop in 2015 with partial funding from an Idaho Department of Lands grant. Members of a focus group he assembled suggested Extension delve more deeply into water quality and stream programs.

Schnepf borrowed some of the workshop content from a six-week short course he teaches on water quality, as well as curriculum from the UI Extension Logger Education to Advance Professionalism (LEAP) program, which is designed to increase loggers’ understanding of forest ecology, silviculture and water quality.

“A lot of this becomes even more important in an era of changing climate where it’s really going to become more important for aquatic species such as trout and salmon and steelhead to be able to move around and find clean-water refuges,” Schnepf said. “A lot of habitat for trout and steelhead isn’t accessible because of barriers.”

Organizers recruit participants by

checking where streams flow through private properties on GIS maps or finding addresses of properties with fish-bearing streams flowing through them at local assessors’ offices and sending mailers to the owners.

Workshop participants learn the basics of assessing stream health. An engineer with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) presents on a range of stream-restoration approaches, ranging from sticking willow boughs along streambanks to take root to more costly stream makeovers involving engineering.

The workshop includes a discussion with a panel of experts from NRCS, local tribes, Idaho Soil and Water Conservation districts, the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality and other agencies.

Workshop participants learn about cost-sharing opportunities and other resources that are available to help them implement their restorations.

“The newer way of doing things is using engineered logjams, introducing large organic debris into the stream to slow it down and using natural ways to armor the banks with roots and twigs and things like that,” Ekins said. ■

To learn more about the workshops, contact Ekins at (208) 292-1287 or jekins@uidaho.edu.



Photo by Sean Ellis

Due to a switch in feed rations, Idaho's dairies are using less water now than they were 20 years ago.

Idaho dairies using less water than 20 years ago

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Despite adding 250,000 cows between 2002 and 2022, Idaho's dairy industry is not using more water in Idaho. In fact, it's using less.

That's according to a recent study by Pat Hatzenbuehler, an assistant professor of crop economics with University of Idaho.

The study shows that Idaho's dairy industry should not be used as a scapegoat by people trying to assess blame for water challenges in the state.

Hatzenbuehler discussed the findings of the report in the December 2023 edition of the *Ag Proud – Idaho* magazine.

He used data from the U.S. Geological Survey and other sources to estimate the change in total water usage by Idaho's dairy industry over time.

“My goal was to highlight what I thought was an important issue and then get the basic conversations started.”

– Pat Hatzenbuehler, assistant professor, U of I

What he found is the state's dairy operations are actually using slightly less water now than they were 20 years ago.

This is due largely to a switch in feed rations by Idaho dairymen, who are feeding their cows more corn and less alfalfa hay than they were two decades ago.

Idaho's milk cow inventory increased from just under 400,000 in 2002 to more than 650,000 in 2022.

Hatzenbuehler's study showed that during that same period, Idaho hay acres declined slightly, from about 1.15 million to about 1.03 million, while the state's total corn acreage rose, from less than 200,000 to more than 350,000.

University of Idaho Extension specialists estimate that the amount of alfalfa hay used in Idaho dairy cow rations has gone down, while the amount of corn silage used in rations has almost doubled.

The shift in feed rations has resulted in a slight decrease in water usage by Idaho dairies, due to the fact that alfalfa hay requires more water to produce than corn silage.

Hatzenbuehler's report estimates it takes 36 inches of water over a full season to grow alfalfa, while corn silage takes 30 inches of water per season to grow.

The report estimated a decline of 384,000 acre-feet of water in Idaho used for alfalfa hay and an increase of 362,500 acre-feet of water used for corn.

Factoring in the increased amount of water consumed per animal, the result was a net decline in water usage by the state's dairies of 14,300 acre-feet.

Hatzenbuehler said there are a couple of things to keep in mind about the study.

One, it doesn't explore the seasonal differences in when water is applied to corn or hay and the seasonal impact on water flow levels.

More water is required for alfalfa hay earlier in the season, while more water is used for corn production later in the season, he said.

The report also didn't look at whether the shift in feed rations has resulted in more or less water being used in certain water-sheds

“I crunched from a very broad level that corn requires a little bit less water than hay overall,” Hatzenbuehler said. “But the distribution during the growing season is different as well. I don't get into those issues” in this report.

Hatzenbuehler said he didn't know what to expect when he started looking at the issue, and there are several things that should require a more targeted, in-depth study.

For example, *when* during the season the water is applied and the impacts on different water sheds should be looked at.

“I just don't know those things,” he said. “I would hope it inspires people to dig into these issues a little more.”

He said he hopes the study is viewed by people as more of a starting point on the issue.

“My goal was to highlight what I thought was an important issue and then get the basic conversations started,” Hatzenbuehler said. “Water is an important thing, so I hope I spurred some conversations among stakeholders (to have) some more ideas for some more in-depth research.”

Idaho Dairymen's Association Executive Director Rick Naerabout said he thought the study was an astute use of publicly available data to dig into the issue of water usage by Idaho's dairy industry.

He said some people have wrongly pointed the finger at the state's dairy industry, without proof, as being the primary cause of aquifer declines in the state.

Yes, he said, feed crops used by the industry do use a lot of water.

“But (the study shows that) the dairy industry is not resulting in the increase in water consumption that some people say it is having,” Naerabout said. “The perception isn't backed up by the data.” ■



A corn field is shown on the left and an alfalfa field on the right. Corn generally takes less water to grow than alfalfa. AdobeStock photo



Thinning for the health of your forest, Part 2

By Randy Brooks
University of Idaho

In my article last month, I wrote about precommercial thinning. If you didn't get a chance to read that, go to the Idaho Farm Bureau website and search for "Thinning for the Health of Your Forest Part 1."

This month, I want to go more in-depth and talk about commercial thinning.

Commercial thinning

Commercial thinning produces a net income from trees that are thinned and is typically done in stands that are at least 20-30+ years old, depending on the site and markets.

For commercial thinning, basal area/acre (the cross-sectional area of the trunks at 4.5 feet above ground expressed in square feet) is often used. Commercial thinning is often followed by a stand regeneration cut 15-30 years later.

If you plan on some natural regeneration, then your leave tree decisions with commercial thinning become more important for maintaining the best genetics in the stand as a future seed source.

The primary focus of commercial thinning is managing a stand for healthier density and growth. Depending on landowner objectives, a landowner might thin to a lower density to favor understory plants for livestock grazing, wildlife, or to reduce fire risk.

Remember that if you thin too heavy, you may get new seedlings regenerating – these species may or may not be suited to the site over the long term and could increase ladder fuels which may need to be addressed later.

LEFT: Thinning forest stands can help eliminate tree-to-tree competition, which increases tree vigor. Photo by Chris Schnepf

Commercial thinning is also an opportunity to use or sell trees that otherwise would die and decay (“capturing mortality”).

Ultimately, the value of a commercial thinning shouldn't be viewed as how much was made on selling the logs but how much stand growth and health is improved.

After paying logging and hauling costs, it's possible to lose money on logs sold during a commercial thinning, especially when removing poorer quality trees. In this case, think of commercial thinning as a lower-cost investment in the future of your forest.

Low thinning

The low thinning method, also called thinning from below, is removal of trees from the understory and lower crown classes (intermediate and suppressed trees). This method typically mimics natural mortality that occurs due to competition within single-aged, single-species stands.

Low thinning has a logical relationship to the natural course of stand development. It is easy to choose which trees to remove. Low thinnings should be fairly heavy or frequent repeated thinnings will need to be made.

Low thinnings are commonly applied to even aged stands of single species in natural regeneration or in plantations. Applying thinning from below often does little to change species composition or successional position of individuals growing the best.

Crown thinning

The crown thinning method (also called thinning from the middle) can overcome some limitations of low thinning. In crown thinning, trees are removed from the middle and upper canopy to favor development of the most promising trees.

This method doesn't focus on cutting the tallest trees. Most trees that are cut come from the co-dominant class that form the main canopy level, but any trees interfering with the development of trees with high potential are removed.

In choosing which tree(s) to favor, the tree with the best quality is chosen regardless of it being a dominant or co-dominant. A common way this method is implemented is using the crown-touching method.

The crown of the desired residual tree is divided into four quadrats and the intensity of the thinning determines how many quadrats of

the desired trees are freed from competition.

Removing trees in all four quadrats is the most intensive implementation of this method and may result in a simplified stand structure over time.

Dominant thinning

Dominant thinning is also known as thinning from above. Here, dominant trees are cut in order to promote growth of lower crown classes.

The vigorous trees favored in crown thinning and heavy low thinning are trees likely to be cut in dominant thinning.

This method is typically only suitable for specific purposes (i.e. removal of poor-quality dominants) and if used carelessly can become a form of high grading, which is the intentional harvesting of the best trees leaving poorer trees which can degrade the stand, genetically speaking.

One example of dominant thinning is species conversion. Changing from shade-intolerant (i.e. pines and larches) to shade tolerant species (i.e. firs and cedar) is a common method of dominant thinning.

Simply creating more growing space can be another reason for this type of thinning. One way to avoid high grading with this system is by only applying dominant thinning once during the rotation to remove defective or undesirable trees.

Freeform thinning

Freeform thinning is utilizing a mixture of two or more thinning methods previously described. It can include a mixture of low, crown, or dominant thinning.

The best example for combining methods is when thinning stands that are irregular in age, density, or composition. This approach can be useful in stands where species are mixed and established in clumps or when past practices, or disturbances have created differences in species composition and stand structure.

Variable density thinning

Variable density thinning was devised to create a more complex forest structure than is typically found in even-aged stands. The goal is to promote more diverse ecological conditions.

Variable density thinning purposefully creates irregular tree spacing that seeks to change a stand that is uniform in species and composition to a stand that is more uneven in canopy, and clumpier/irregular in species composition.

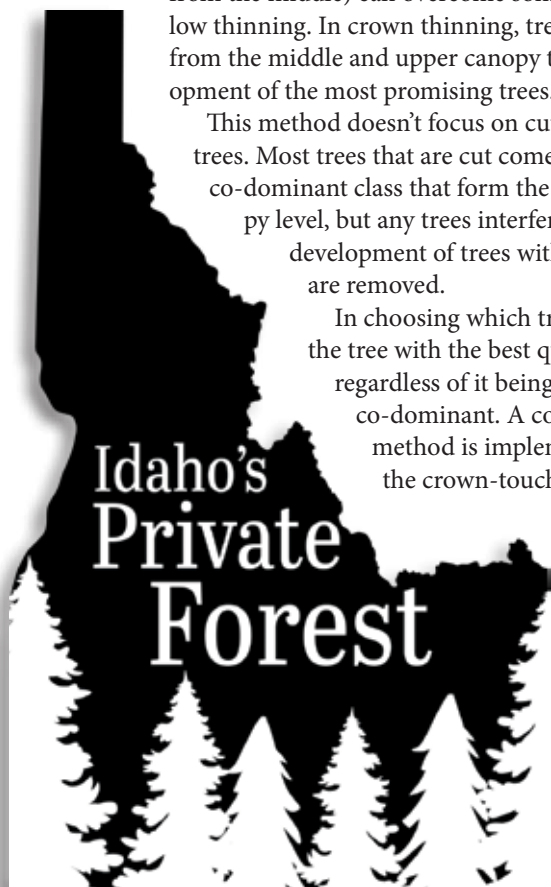
It has been used mostly in Douglas-fir plantations in the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia.

The basic characteristic of this type of thinning is the establishment of both canopy gaps and thick, unthinned patches in uniform stands.

In closing, thinning is an excellent tool in our resource management toolbox. There can be some temporary elevated fire risk from slash after a thinning, but ultimately thinning usually reduces fire risk by creating healthier trees and reducing fuel continuity.

Deciding on which method of thinning works best is always the toughest part of the thinning equation. ■

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





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Hundreds of community members turned out for a Thank a Farmer event in Preston May 17.

Photos by Sean Ellis

Preston community flocks to Thank a Farmer event

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

PRESTON — For the second year in a row, hundreds of Preston community members showed up to thank farmers for growing their food.

The May 17 Thank a Farmer event, which attracted hundreds of people from all walks of life, was full of facts about Idaho and Franklin County agriculture, and several local farms and ranches had their stories highlighted there.

The goal was simple: to provide an opportunity for people, if they chose to, to thank a farmer for growing their food.

People had an opportunity to fill out a thank you card or scan a QR code and express their gratitude digitally.

All the thank yous will be compiled together and sent out in packets by mail to farmers in the area.

“It’s always good to be appreciated, even if you don’t feel like you need it. There’s nothing better than a heartfelt thank you.”

– Jason Fellows, Franklin County farmer

“It’s just to show the farmers ‘thank you’ for all that they do in our community,” said Braden Smith, a Farm Bureau insurance agent in Preston. “From growing the food all the way to the support and business that they bring into the community that keeps the community alive.”

“We know farmers have taken a hard hit the last couple of years



ABOVE: This calf was a popular attraction at a Thank a Farmer event in Preston May 17. RIGHT: A constant line of people lined up for free food and a chance to thank a farmer May 17 in Preston.



and we just want to let them know we appreciate them,” said Brittney Smith, a Farm Bureau insurance agent in Franklin County.

The event was created and organized by Franklin County Farm Bureau.

The county has 727 farms and 276,073 acres of land in farming, according to the 2022 Census of Agriculture. Farmers and ranchers here brought in a total of \$132 million in farm-gate revenue during the 2022 census year.

There were 46,000 acres of hay harvested in the county in 2022, almost 12,000 acres of wheat, 5,361 acres of corn for silage, 4,478 acres of safflower, and 3,179 acres of barley.

There also 35,274 cows and calves in Franklin County and that sector alone brought in \$62 million in farm-gate revenue in 2022.

Put those all together and agriculture plays a vital role in the economy and culture of Franklin County.

“We know how important ag is to our community and we demonstrate that by doing something like this,” said Lance Zollinger, chairman of Franklin County Farm Bureau’s Promotion and Education Committee.

Everyone who attended the Thank a Farmer event received a free cheeseburger, milk and a bag of chips.

The event included some very large, and very expensive, farm equipment on loan from local equipment dealers, two calves, coloring books and other activities for youngsters, and a plastic cow that children could “milk.”

It was not by accident that it was held next to a local grocery store – Stoke’s Market – which not only welcomed the event wholeheartedly but also donated much of the food.

“We thought it would be a great way to tie the two together,” said FCFB President Travis Beckstead, who owns a cow-calf operation and markets some hay. “People come in to buy their groceries ... and it just leads to an opportunity to teach them a little about agriculture.”

Beckstead said the event serves a dual purpose: “I think it’s important that we thank those who grow our food, and also educate those that don’t know where our food comes from.”

Zollinger said that after last year’s inaugural event, members of the commu-

nity and businesses immediately reached out and said they wanted to help on the following year’s event.

“We immediately found out there was a desire to make sure this is something we continue doing,” he said. “I just love how well the community has responded. Everybody wants to support this type of event.”

Franklin County farmer Jason Fellows, who grows a variety of crops as well as beef cattle and horses in Weston, said the event was a great way to help connect people’s food with farmers and ranchers who grow it.

“I think it’s really important for the community to recognize where their food comes from, and that our local farmers are actually the ones producing it; they’re making food and fiber for everyone,” he said.

Fellows said that even though farmers don’t necessarily need a pat on the back for doing what they do, it is nice to know they are appreciated.

“It’s always good to be appreciated, even if you don’t feel like you need it,” he said. “There’s nothing better than a heartfelt thank you.” ■

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RARING TO RODEO

U of I coach seeks to elevate club's profile

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

MOSCOW, Idaho -- Coach Jamie Slocum knows her ambitions are bold and hard work will be in store for her team — but it's not her first rodeo.

As a student athlete in the spring of 2011, Slocum had a meager budget and encountered one barrier after another when she somehow pulled together the University of Idaho Rodeo Club's first home competition in more than a decade.

Slocum now aims to grab the bull by the horns as the new coach of the club, housed within the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, and repeat history. Next fall — if all goes as planned — the club will again host U of I's first home rodeo in more than a decade under her leadership.

Pulling off a successful rodeo could also give a needed jolt to the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association's entire Northwest Region, which includes mostly community colleges and has struggled with participation.



New U of I rodeo
coach Jamie Slocum.
Photos courtesy of
Jamie Slocum



"Within our region we're not able to recruit for rodeo because we're not able to host rodeos," Slocum said. "A lot of people don't even know the rodeo club exists, and if they knew U of I had a rodeo team I think they would be likely to support it."

Slocum works as a seed treatment agronomist with McGregor Co. In college, she competed in goat tying and barrel racing.

She contacted the club's student leaders last fall and offered up the 150- by 200-foot roping arena at her Palouse home for their occasional practices, along with the use of six steers and five calves.

The club jumped at the offer and also roped Slocum into sharing her expertise. She's now coaching alongside Alan Chipman, who affiliated with the club seven years ago, along with his late wife, Tammy.

"I am thrilled to have Jamie Slocum come on because she knows so many contacts in the area that I am not aware of. That's opened a whole bunch for us," Chipman said. "She makes a great addition, and I don't have to try to get steers and cows for practice at my place."

Slocum plans to start bringing professional rodeo athletes to work with the team during future practices.

The club's advisor is Stacey Doumit, senior instructor within the Department of Animal, Veterinary and Food Sciences.

"With Jamie as one of their coaches, they've got some good momentum going, and I'm super excited for them," Doumit said.

As an athlete, Slocum joined the club in 2008, when she transferred to U of I from Spokane Community College. She was the club's president during her senior year, in addition to participating in the Student Idaho Cattle Association.

Her primary goal as president was to host a home-based rodeo

LEFT: Jamie Slocum shares her arena and expertise as U of I's new rodeo coach. Her goal is for U of I to begin hosting rodeos again.

“Now that I’ve got to watch them and coach them, they have a lot of potential. They are doing really well for the resources they have compared with the other schools that have practices every week.”

– Jamie Slocum, U of I rodeo coach

— something that hadn’t happened in years – that she believed would revitalize the program.

Through her involvement in the Palouse Empire Fair, Slocum received a discounted rate to use the arena at the rodeo grounds in nearby Colfax, Wash. The team also found donors to supply hay for horses and livestock, and they got a good deal on a livestock contractor through a club member.

The weather didn’t cooperate, however. Prior to the event, they pumped moisture from a soggy hay field designated as their parking area, but ultimately had to bring in tractors to pull out pickup trucks that got stuck in the muck.

It was cold and snowy on the first day of the rodeo, and their crowd was small. Yet they met their goal of hosting a qualifying rodeo for nationals.

“The amount of work that went into it is why I think one hasn’t happened since then,” Slocum said.

The spring season has finished and the club is aiming to host a home rodeo at the Lewiston Roundup Grounds next fall. The students will be active in fundraising and approaching area businesses for sponsorships in the meantime.

Slocum believes elevating the rodeo team’s profile would help attract students who are active in the sport to U of I.

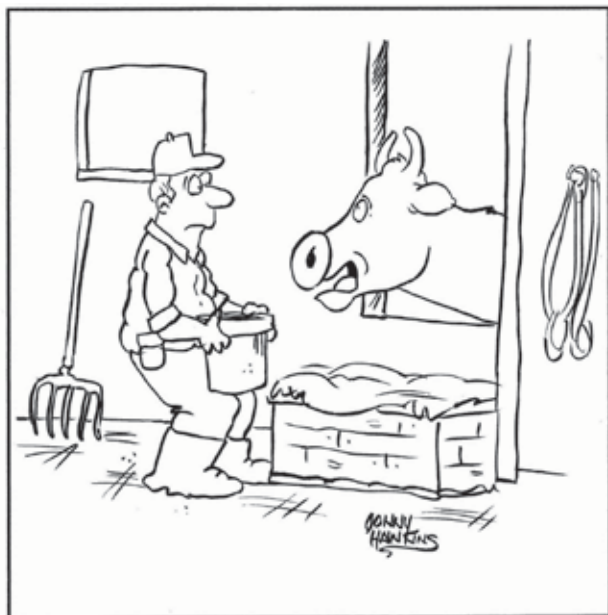
About two decades ago, U of I hosted a successful regional rodeo in the Kibbie Dome. Eventually, Slocum would like to help restore a regional rodeo at the Kibbie Dome and make it the season’s first competition. The club has 13 members, nine of whom are enrolled in CALS.

During the regional finals rodeo in Hermiston, Ore., team members Katelyn Hurl and Lauryn Riney, both CALS students, qualified to compete in barrel racing at the College National Finals Rodeo, which will be hosted in Casper, Wyo., in June.

“Now that I’ve got to watch them and coach them, they have a lot of potential,” Slocum said. “They are doing really well for the resources they have compared with the other schools that have practices every week.” ■

Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins



“I just don’t have a taste for it right now, though I know that goes against the grain.”



“Know the pecking order, don’t try to be as sly as a fox, and for Heaven’s sake - don’t ruffle his feathers!”

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ISDA Answers Your Questions About Grasshopper and Mormon Cricket Control



Last year, grasshopper and cricket populations surged across the state, and this year is no exception. Mormon crickets and grasshoppers are natural components of Southern Idaho's ecosystem; however, populations reaching outbreak levels across the West have left serious economic losses to rangeland forage and other agricultural-use lands.

What is the Idaho State Department of Agriculture Grasshopper and Mormon Cricket Control Program?

The ISDA Grasshopper and Mormon Cricket Control Program mitigates damages caused by these species in order to protect Idaho's agriculture industry. The program provides pest management information and insecticide bait to control damaging infestations on private and state-owned lands. The ISDA's goal is not to eradicate these species but to suppress them to economically sustainable levels.

What qualifies for assistance?

- 5+ acres of private agricultural-use land
- Active infestation
- Densities meet economic threshold
 - Mormon crickets - 3 per square meter
 - Grasshoppers - 8 per square meter



What defines agricultural-use land?

For the purposes of our program, agricultural-use land is defined as cropland, rangeland, or pasture that is a major source of income for the landowner or provides feed for grazing cattle. Structures, lawns, flower beds, personal gardens, etc. are not considered agricultural-use land and do not count toward the 5-acre minimum.

What types of assistance does ISDA offer?

For landowners qualifying for assistance, ISDA distributes 5% Carbaryl insecticide bait free of charge. In cases where insecticide bait is not optimal treatment, the ISDA offers a reimbursement of preapproved insecticide and any required adjuvants. Both bait and insecticide application are the responsibility of the landowners, along with the requirement to abide by the EPA approved product labels and follow principles of sound pesticide stewardship. Additionally, the ISDA conducts right-of-way treatments on state highways when Mormon cricket densities reach hazardous levels.

I am a landowner in need of assistance. What should I do?

First, make sure you meet the qualifications for assistance. Then, fill out the Landowner Assistance Request Form online. Your form will be sent to ISDA Invasive Species Program staff. ISDA staff will evaluate your form and follow up with a phone call to discuss next steps.

What is USDA's role?

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is an important partner in the overall program. USDA APHIS conducts statewide surveys to determine the density and species composition of grasshopper populations on rangelands as well as suppression projects. While balancing a variety of ecological considerations, USDA APHIS also oversees the management of grasshopper and Mormon cricket populations on federal lands.

Taking on such a large volume of requests would not be possible without the collaboration from county weed, road and bridge, and extension programs across the state. Collaborators are essential in directing landowners to the program, helping distribute bait and working to ensure that their community members received the assistance they qualified for.

Outbreaks have been established in several counties across Idaho. To submit a request for assistance, visit invasivespecies.idaho.gov/grasshopper.

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LOOKING FOR A NEW PODCAST? DIRT ROAD DISCUSSIONS

Episode 57: Mind Your Melon - Preventing Farmer Suicide

Marshal Sewell's thoughts about the farmer's mental health changed with the suicide of his father. In this podcast, Marshal talks about his own quest to prevent further suicides through open dialogue about the pressures of farming and steps that can be taken to identify and help someone going down that path. He shared how he started the Mind Your Melon movement.

