# GEM TO CUCETO

March 2019 • Volume 23 Issue 2



# Dairy gets a lifeline in new Farm Bill



he last few years have been tough for dairy farmers. Or maybe I should say even tougher, since the ups and downs of dairy prices often make the dairy business challenging. But things are especially challenging now.

The price of milk today is less than it was a decade ago. To anyone out there who draws a paycheck, I ask you to think about having to live and fund a business on the same amount of money, or even less, than you earned a decade ago. That's what our dairy farmers are

coping with.

Fortunately, help is on the way via the new farm bill. The new Dairy Margin Coverage program makes payments when the national income-over-feed-cost margin falls below a set level. Based on the margins of the past 10 years, we know that the new program will provide more support than the previous Margin Protection Program, which it replaced.

Under DMC Tier I coverage, available on the first 5 million pounds of milk produced,

See DUVALL, page 7

# The President's Desk

By Bryan Searle

President Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

# Farm Bureau really is the voice of agriculture



t's not just an empty slogan: Farm Bureau truly is the voice of agriculture. Several recent developments on the national and state level bear this out.

When signing the new proposed language for the "Waters of the United States" rule, EPA delayed the meeting so American Farm Bureau officials and state Farm Bureau presidents could attend the December meeting, which was held at EPA Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

During that meeting, Farm Bureau's nonstop efforts to ditch the old rule were credited several times.

The next week, Farm Bureau officials were invited to be at the White House for the signing ceremony for the new farm bill.

Those two developments are a powerful message that our nation's leaders recognize that Farm Bureau speaks for farmers and ranchers and acts as their collective voice.

In Idaho, 21 of the state's 25 new lawmakers attended Idaho Farm Bureau Federation's annual freshman luncheon in January. Many of those See **SEARLE**, page 6

# **Inside Farm Bureau**

**By Rick Keller** 

CEO Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

# Know your Farm Bureau – state directors



his year marks the 100th anniversary of the American Farm Bureau. Farm Bureau has grown steadily in membership, strength, power and achievement.

It is the recognized voice of the farmers and ranchers of America and Idaho. Farmers, ranchers, educators, legislators and the great bulk of American citizens look to it for guidance in agricultural problems and agricultural planning.

Each organization has an individuality – a personality. Farm Bureau reflects faithfully

the personality of its individual farmer members. It is practical, staunchly independent, conservative, careful in making up its mind, clear thinking, vigorous in carrying out its plans.

It looks at problems from a long-range point of view and is thoroughly conscious of the fact that what is good for this country is, in the long run, good for the farmer. Its members are first American citizens and second, farmers and ranchers.

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Photo by Steve Ritter

COVER: Sheep that are part of the Shirts Sheep Co. operation are pictured near a hop yard outside of Wilder in southwestern Idaho earlier this winter.



Photo by Steve Ritter

Rep. Scott Bedke, R-Oakley, speaks about a bill he sponsored that helps resolve a long-running court battle over how flood control releases from the Boise River system should be accounted for. Bedke, a rancher and speaker of the Idaho House of Representatives, spoke about the legislation Feb. 13 shortly after it was signed into law by Gov. Brad Little.

# Legislation will help resolve flood control dispute

**By Sean Ellis** 

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE — A bill that paves the way to resolve a long-running court battle over how flood control releases from the Boise River system should be accounted for has been signed into law.

House Bill 1 will help end a

lengthy and costly legal battle between the state and water users in Water District 63, which spans from Boise to Parma in the Treasure Valley of southwestern Idaho.

About 350,000 acres in the region are irrigated by water from the Boise River system's reservoirs.

See REFILL, page 8



Photo by Sean Ellis

A potato field is harvested near Pingree last year. Depressed commodity prices, coupled with rising input costs, are causing many farmers and ranchers to face some tough challenges at the moment.

# 2019 outlook for Idaho agriculture is mixed

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO — Idaho's agricultural sector continues to be a vital part of the state's economy but depressed commodity prices, coupled with rising input costs, are causing many farmers and ranchers to face some tough challenges at the moment.

That was the general message during University of Idaho's annual "Idaho Ag Outlook Seminars," which took

place Dec. 11-13 in Idaho Falls, Burley and Caldwell.

About 230 producers and ag industry members attended the seminars, which included a dozen presenters who discussed the health of the state's agricultural sector and provided a look at what farmers and ranchers could expect in the coming year.

While agriculture continues to be the stalwart of Idaho's economy, particularly in rural areas, many Gem State producers, like their colleagues around the nation, are facing some challenging times as farm commodity prices

# 'Costs for many inputs, including fuel, chemical, fertilizer and labor, are expected to increase in 2019, which will increase the cost of production.'

— Ashlee Westerhold, UI extension economist in Twin Falls

remain depressed and many input costs continue to inch up, said UI Agricultural Economist Garth Taylor.

"This is a tough time for agriculture," he said during the Idaho Falls

Taylor and fellow UI Agricultural Economist Ben Eborn are forecasting that total farm cash receipts in Idaho during 2018 were basically the same as 2017 but net farm income decreased substantially.

The good news for Idaho, Taylor said, is that agriculture, which accounts for 14 percent of jobs in the state directly and indirectly, as well as 16 percent of the state's total Gross Domestic Product, will continue to have a stabilizing effect on the state's economy even though many farmers are struggling.

That, he said, is because farmers spend roughly the same amount of money on seed, fertilizer, cattle feed, labor, etc., regardless of how much they receive for their commodity.

"It doesn't matter whether milk is \$14 (per hundredweight) or \$24, that cow still has to be fed and milked," Taylor said.

He said that despite the challenging times in farm country, producers in Idaho and around the U.S. have pretty clean balance sheets overall.

But "that does not mean there aren't some points of stress, particularly in the dairy industry," he said.

The outlook for Idaho's 457 dairy operations isn't rosy, said Idaho Dairymen's Association Executive

Director Rick Naerebout.

"Even the bullish guys seem a little bit bearish" on dairy prices, he said.

Dairy is Idaho agriculture's No. 1 farm commodity in terms of farmgate receipts.

As milk prices continue to be below the break-even point for many dairymen, Idaho lost 15 dairy operations in 2018, Naerebout said.

But forecasts show that milk prices could inch above the break-even point toward the latter part of 2019,

"Hopefully, we'll see some light at the end of the tunnel on dairy prices during the latter part of the year," Eborn said.

The outlook for wheat, Idaho's No. 4 farm commodity, is for slightly better prices in 2019, said Jon Hogge, a UI grain extension specialist in Rexburg.

Prices for wheat, corn and barley, Idaho's No. 7 farm commodity, should be a little higher during 2019, he said, and there will opportunities for producers to make some money on these commodities if they are on top of their game and wise about how they market their crop.

A widespread potato crop failure in the European Union during 2018 could potentially have a positive impact on potato prices, said Bruce Huffaker, president of North American Potato Market News.

"The European Union has had a widespread potato crop failure. The losses are substantial," he said.

As a result of those losses, French fry production from European nations could be down 10-15 percent this year, Huffaker said, and that will cause a lot of market turmoil globally. He said that should have a positive impact on prices for Idaho farmers who grow potatoes, the state's No. 3 farm commodity and No. 1 crop.

"We should be getting higher prices for potatoes," Eborn said, summing up Huffaker's presentation.

Alfalfa hay, the state's No. 5 crop, could be one of the bright spots for Idaho's agricultural industry again in 2018, according to Reed Findlay, a UI extension educator out of Blackfoot.

"In the Pacific Northwest this year, alfalfa was one of the crops that was a little bit profitable," he said, adding that projections are for hay prices in 2019 to remain relatively stable or possibly tick up a bit higher.

Costs for many inputs, including fuel, chemical, fertilizer and labor, are expected to increase in 2019, which will increase the cost of production, said Ashlee Westerhold, a UI extension economist in Twin Falls.

A wild card hanging over the outlook for U.S. agriculture in 2019 is China, said Doug Robison, the Idaho president for Northwest Farm Credit Services.

If the United States and China succeed in reaching a trade deal, "it will be a bit of a boon for agriculture here in the U.S.," he said.

But China's growth has started to level off, which could be a major headwind in commodities markets. Robison said. ■

# KELLER

Continued from page 2

Farm Bureau's strength lies first in its people, its human assets, and second in the working principles of the organization, those ideas which are intangible, but no less real, assets.

One of Farm Bureau's assets is the officers whom you choose to lead and represent you. The membership has consistently shown a determination and an ability to seek the best type of leaders. They have demanded and found leaders who have wisdom, courage, patience and practicality, as well as vision, enthusiasm and determination.

Farm Bureau leaders make sacrifices – in money, in time taken from their regular work, in absence from family – to carry on the work which the members plan.

Leadership in Farm Bureau is entrusted to men and women who are dedicated not alone to Farm Bureau, but to the overall welfare of our state and country. Farm Bureau officers are thoughtfully chosen, trained and tested by experience. They are truly representative of the members and, consequently, receive

their loyal support.

The Idaho Farm Bureau board of directors consists of 19 individuals from around the state. Your current directors are reflective of its membership. Each is a farmer or rancher, dedicated to seeing that the governance measures of the state and county associations remain in the hands of bona fide farmers and ranchers.

The board membership consists of men and women living and operating farms and ranches ranging from less than a hundred acres to some of the largest in the state, overseeing thousands of acres.

Prior to serving on the state board, many have served on county Farm Bureau boards as directors and county presidents. They have also served on local school boards, hospital boards and as county commissioners. They serve or have served on the boards of local canal and irrigation districts, soil conservation districts, and local and state farm credit advisory committees.

They belong to and are active in state and local commodity organizations, representing the crops and livestock they raise, from dairy to the hay and forage groups which provide the feed to the dairies. They are in leadership positions for livestock, wheat, barley, and sugar beet organizations; serving locally, statewide and nationally.

Some are active in the political parties of their choice, seeking to influence their party's platforms to seek the best interest of the state and agriculture.

Some are on university advisory groups to local school advisors. They are 4-H advisors and Little League coaches. Most are active in their local communities and worship in the churches just down the road.

They shop locally and know the local business people, teachers, nurses, insurance agents, law enforcement officers, craftsmen and craftswomen that provide valuable services where we all live.

They are your neighbors and friends.

And they still take the time to direct and lead the largest general farm organization in the state, representing more than 80,000 member-families.

We are thankful for their expertise, knowledge, commitment, and willingness to serve. They are an indispensable component in your Farm Bureau. ■

# **SEARLE** -

Continued from page 2

who attended that event have visited often with IFBF employees since then to tap the organization's thinking on a number of issues.

In fact, many of the state's elected officials regularly look at IFBF's policy book and ask for clarity on many of our organization's policies.

During IFBF's annual meeting in December, Rep. Russ Fulcher, the newest member of Idaho's congressional delegation, told several hundred Farm Bureau members that while he served in the Idaho Legislature, he kept two books in his drawer: The Bible and IFBF's policy book.

Idaho Farm Bureau's commodity committees remain active in state commodity issues and play an active role in many issues important to the state's agricultural community.

For example, members of IFBF's bean committee were invited last April to join the Idaho Bean Commission during its regular meeting. IBC members wanted to know what Farm Bureau felt about the commission's plan to try to ban soybean production in some areas of Idaho, an idea the IBC has since dropped.

This year, American Farm Bureau Federation is celebrating its 100th anniversary, while Idaho Farm Bureau Federation is celebrating its 79th anniversary. Organizations don't last that long unless they are relevant and serving their members' needs.

Collectively, those are a handful of examples showing that Farm Bureau continues to be the voice for agriculture.

Of course, the organization is only able to serve that role because of the grassroots efforts of its members, who are real farmers and ranchers who develop policy that addresses the real-world issues they face.

When Farm Bureau's grassroots members stay engaged in issues and involved with the organization, it results in the creation of sound policy.

Because Farm Bureau truly is a grassroots organization, when AFBF, IFBF and the other state Farm Bureaus take a stance on certain issues, they can truly claim to be speaking as the voice of agriculture.

My message to Farm Bureau members is to stay engaged and involved with the organization and help us continue to develop sound policy that protects agriculture. When your voice is collectively combined with the millions of other members involved in Farm Bureau, the organization can continue to accurately describe itself as the voice of agriculture.

# DUVALL

Continued from page 2

margin guarantees are set at \$8.50, \$9 and \$9.50, depending on the coverage selected and paid for by the producer. The average margin over the last decade was \$8.11, so even the lower end of coverage in this top tier of the program will provide more certainty and support

during a downturn

The coverage also is more affordable. The farm bill reduced premiums 30 percent for the top tier of coverage. The premium for a second, lower tier, available to those who need coverage on more than 5 million pounds of milk, was reduced 88 percent in this farm bill. These lower premiums are meant to encourage more dairy farmers to sign up.

'I'm saddened that these tools are coming too late for so many multigeneration family dairy farms that have shut down in recent years. But I'm hopeful that they will quickly come along in time to save many more from the auction block.'

A further 25 percent premium discount for dairy farmers making a one-time election of coverage level and amount of milk covered for the next five years sweetens the pot and ensures the farm bill will do its job — help more dairy farms survive a price collapse, a feed-cost spike or a combination of the two.

Every farm bill makes improvements on the last one. Farmers and ranchers weigh in on what has worked and what hasn't, and Congress writes new program provisions to afford the best possible web of risk management tools possible.

The Margin Protection Program created in the 2014 farm bill was the first attempt to address tight profit margins. It was a good idea that just didn't go far enough to help milk producers with the market volatility that was headed their way.

That's why farmers and their representatives in Congress get another whack at farm programs every five years — because markets change and so should farm bills.

Another new risk management tool, Dairy Revenue Protection, became available last October, even before the improvements in the 2018 farm bill. Dairy-RP already is proving to be popular with producers.

The insurance product, run by USDA's Risk Management Agency and available through licensed crop insurance agents, gives producers a way to protect themselves from price drops, not just tight margins. In the first few months these insurance policies were available, Dairy-RP policies were in place on more than 13 billion pounds of milk, 6 percent of the expected U.S. milk production for 2019.

Farm Bureau is proud to have worked with USDA to create and launch the new Dairy-RP insurance product. Dairy farmers need all the risk management options they can get! Just like row crop producers, milk producers now have the

flexibility to use both the programs in the farm bill and crop insurance together to survive the risk inherent in farming and dairy production.

I'm saddened that these tools are coming too late for so many multi-generation family dairy farms that have shut down in recent years. But I'm hopeful that they will quickly come

along in time to save many more from the auction block.

AFBF is working hard to communicate how important a timely farm bill implementation is for dairy farmers. As a dairy producer for many years before switching to beef cattle and poultry production, I still have a great love of dairying. My favorite food is vanilla ice cream, and I know I'm not alone. Americans love dairy foods and want to save our dairy farms!

I'm confident that these new tools will help an industry that is near and dear to me, personally, and vital to consumers, our economy and our nation's agricultural heritage.





U.S. Bureau of Reclamation photo

Anderson Ranch reservoir is shown in this file photo. Idaho lawmakers have passed a bill that is meant to help resolve a long-running court battle over how flood control releases from the Boise River system should be accounted for.

# REFILL

Continued from page 3

It was the first bill introduced in the Idaho Legislature and passed the House and Senate by a combined vote of 102-0.

Gov. Brad Little, a Republican rancher from Emmett, signed the bill into law Feb. 13, surrounded by people from both sides of the issue.

"Today is a big day for all Idahoans, particularly for those who live in the Treasure Valley and especially for people whose livelihood depends upon water," Little said.

The governor and others involved in the agreement credited Rep. Scott Bedke, speaker of the Idaho House of Representatives, for bringing the two sides together and encouraging them to reach an agreement.

Bedke, a Republican rancher from Oakley, said a lot of hard work was involved in the negotiations and he credited the parties for agreeing on a resolution rather than continuing to fight the issue out in court.

"It was tough and I don't want to downplay that," he said. But, he added, "We've come quite a long way. This is the culmination of a lot of hard work and perseverance."

He called the bill "a landmark piece of legislation" and said it's a template that shows it's preferable and possible "to negotiate before we litigate and legislate...."

"Let me emphasize, this was not

ordered by a judge but negotiated and agreed to by all of the principals, in writing, and confirmed by the legislature," Little said.

The Idaho Department of Water Resources and a group of Treasure Valley water users have fought over the issue of flood control accounting for years.

Water is released from the Boise River reservoir system seven out of 10 years, during winter months, to prevent spring flooding in the state's most populous area.

Irrigators, who own the most senior water rights in the valley, say those flood control releases should not count against the rights they have to water stored in the reservoirs

# 'We've come quite a long way. This is the culmination of a lot of hard work and perseverance.'

— Rep. Scott Bedke, Speaker of the Idaho House of Representatives

because they occur during a time when canals and irrigation ditches aren't operating and they can't use the water.

They say that counting those flood control releases against their water rights could result in a catastrophic situation where farmers and other irrigators run out of water in the middle of summer, long before crops are harvested.

IDWR officials say the releases should count against water rights and claim the way the department accounts for flood control releases actually protects the storage water rights of all water right holders, senior and junior, and ensures the water is used for maximum benefit.

Judge Eric Wildman, presiding judge of the Snake River Basin Adjudication Court, ruled in favor of the state in 2016. Water users appealed that ruling to the Idaho Supreme Court.

Bedke told Senate committee members during a public hearing on the legislation that the issue is very complex but the bill is simple.

"It's a rather simple answer to what ended up being a multiple year conflict here in the Treasure Valley," he said.

The bill adds a short section to Idaho Code that ensures any new water storage projects do not interfere with existing reservoir storage rights.

As a result of a proposed settlement agreement reached between the state and water users last year, both parties agreed to put the Supreme Court case on hold. It has been stayed until Nov. 30, 2019.

The bill is just one of several facets of the settlement agreement. If all are met, the case before the state's highest court will be dismissed. If not, either side could continue with the appeal.

The settlement agreement still has to be approved by the SRBA court.

The dispute over how flood control releases are accounted for was a major concern of Treasure Valley irrigators, who formed the Treasure Valley Water Users Association as a result of it.

"It's the biggest issue we've dealt with in decades here in this valley," said TVWUA Executive Director Roger Batt. "Our folks considered it a real threat to their existing senior water storage rights."

He said the settlement agreement provides irrigators certainty and added, "We think it's a good piece of legislation. Our entire water user community that is part of this in the Treasure Valley supports House Bill 1."

Richard Durrant, a farmer and member of the Boise-Kuna Irrigation District board of directors, said that "it's really important to be able to get closure on this issue and know that we're going to be protected against any flood control issues."

During a public hearing in the Senate, 26 people signed up to testify on the bill, all of them in support. Since it will be applicable to everyone in Idaho, every water user stakeholder had an opportunity to weigh in on it, Bedke said.

"Everyone is in agreement with this piece of legislation," he said. "Everyone up and down the Snake and Boise (river systems) were in the middle of this and are OK with it."

IDWR Director Gary Spackman also blessed the legislation, calling it a good compromise between the parties.

"I strongly support this bill," he said. "This legislation is being offered as a settlement to some very difficult legal and factual issues that came before this department."





Photo by Sean Ellis

A sugar beet field is harvested last fall. Total net farm income in Idaho declined by an estimated 27 percent last year, the fifth straight year of declining net farm income in the state.

# Idaho net farm income declined 27 percent in 2018

### By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO — Idaho farmers and ranchers brought in an estimated \$7.18 billion in farm cash receipts during 2018, virtually unchanged from 2017's \$7.2 billion total.

But because farm input expenses increased last year, total net farm income in Idaho dropped an estimated 27 percent in 2018, according to University of Idaho's annual "Financial Condition of Idaho Agriculture" report.

The report for 2018 was released Jan. 3 to Idaho lawmakers and it didn't contain good news when it comes to net farm income, which is the farmer's bottom line, or revenues minus costs.

"We're looking at another disastrous year for agriculture for net farm income," said UI Agricultural Economist Garth Taylor, one of the report's authors.

Although prices for many of Idaho's main farm commodi-

ties are depressed, total farm cash receipts in Idaho last were basically unchanged from 2017 because production of most crops was up due to record or higher than average yields, he said.

"It is not the quantity that is going down. It is the prices that are going down," Taylor said. "We had very good yields last year."

"We're still having record production and yields in almost everything we produce but prices are just terrible," said report co-author Ben Eborn, a UI ag economist.

There are large carryover stocks of most of the state's main farm commodities, he said. "Until we burn through that excess supply, prices aren't going to come back up."

Eborn and Taylor estimate that Idaho's total farm revenue in 2018, including farm cash receipts, government payments and custom work, was \$7.9 billion, unchanged from 2017.

But expenses increased 4 percent to \$7 billion.

"Our crop revenues are virtually the same as they were

last year," Taylor said. "But the expenses have really skyrocketed for a lot of farmers."

The report estimates total Idaho net farm income in 2018 at \$902 million, which is a 27 percent decrease from 2017 and 60 percent below the state record for NFI, which is \$2.25 billion and set in 2011.

Last year was the fifth straight year of declining net farm income in Idaho.

The 27 percent drop in NFI in 2018 follows a similar 27 percent decline in 2017, and that decrease came on top of a 7 percent decline in 2016, a 9 percent decrease in 2015 and a 3 percent decline in 2014.

If realized, Idaho's estimated NFI total for 2018 would be the lowest since 2009, when milk prices hit a record low.

While many farmers and ranchers are hurting financially right now, agriculture remains the bedrock of the state's economy, Taylor told lawmakers.

According to a UI study, agriculture directly and indirectly accounts for one in seven jobs in the state, 16 percent of Idaho's total gross domestic product and 20 percent of total sales.

While there is no doubt many farmers and ranchers are struggling right now, the good news for Idaho's economy is that ag producers spend about the same amount of money to produce their farm commodity each year, regardless of how much money they make, Taylor said.

For example, he said, cows still need to be cared for and fed regardless of whether a dairy operation is making or losing money. And a potato farmer still spends roughly the same amount of money each year on inputs to produce their spud crop.

"Whether prices are good or bad, we still employ basically the same amount of people in agriculture each year," Eborn said. "And farmers and ranchers still purchase the same amount of inputs. The farm never sits idle, even for one year. That's a good thing."

The UI report estimates farm cash receipts from Idaho crops totaled \$3 billion in 2018, up 5 percent over 2017. Cash receipts from livestock production are estimated at \$4.2 billion, down 4

percent from 2017.

In both livestock and crop production, revenues were mostly kept up by production and not prices.

Revenue from milk, Idaho's top farm commodity in terms of cash receipts, are estimated at \$2.4 billion in 2018, down 6 percent from 2017. Production increased 2 percent but prices averaged 8 percent lower.

Revenues from beef, Idaho's No. 2 farm commodity, totaled \$1.6 billion last year, down 1 percent from 2017.

Potatoes remained the state's No. 1 crop with estimated revenues of \$864 million in 2018, a 4 percent decrease from 2017. Total potato production increased 3 percent last year and yields reached a record high of 440 hundredweight per acre, but the average potato price in Idaho was down 13 percent.

Idaho wheat revenues for 2018 are estimated at \$490 million, a 16 percent increase over 2017. Production increased 15 percent over 2017 and prices increased 14 percent.

Hay revenues are projected to be \$483 million, a 26 percent increase over 2017. Hay production in Idaho increased 12 percent in 2018 and prices were up 9 percent.

Considering that about 45 percent of the hay produced in Idaho is used on the farm where it was grown and is not sold, the total value of hay production in Idaho is estimated at \$835 million in 2018

Taylor and Eborn project Idaho sugar beet revenue in 2018 was up 3 percent to \$302 million. Production increased 1 percent and prices increased 2 percent.

Barley revenue is projected to have increased 3 percent to \$245 million. Production was up 10 percent and prices were down 6 percent.

Revenue from dry beans, which include garbanzo beans, is estimated at \$74 million, which is 14 percent higher than in 2017. Yields were unchanged from 2017 and prices were down 14 percent, but acres increased by 6 percent.

The Financial Condition of Idaho Agriculture report shows that livestock remains the biggest part of Idaho agriculture. Almost 59 percent of the state's farm cash receipts come from livestock production – milk, beef cattle, trout and sheep.

When animal feed such as hay, corn silage, feed grains and the by-products of beet pulp and potato waste is factored in, about 75 percent of Idaho's agricultural sector involves livestock.

Farm cash receipts from livestock have surpassed crop revenue in Idaho every year since 2001, with the exception of 2009, a year of disastrously low milk prices.

If realized, the estimated \$7.18 billion in total Idaho farm cash receipts in 2018 would be 18 percent lower than the record high of \$8.8 billion in 2014.

In real dollars, which is revenue that is adjusted for inflation, Idaho's estimated farm cash receipts in 2018 are 28 percent higher than the 39-year average.

However, total Idaho NFI in 2018 is estimated to be 33 percent below the 49-year average in real dollar terms.

The 4 percent increase in estimated farm expenses in 2018 is attributed to a 3 percent increase in farm-origin inputs – feed, seed, replacement livestock purchases – and a 4 percent increase in manufactured inputs, which include fertilizer, chemicals and fuel.

Other expenses, including machine hire and custom work, marketing, storage, transportation, repairs and maintenance, were up 3 percent, and contract labor costs increased 4 percent.

One of the bright spots contained in the report is that total gross domestic product from Idaho farming increased much faster than Idaho's total GDP from 1997-2017.

Based on data from the U.S. Department of Commerce and Bureau of Economic Analysis, Eborn and Taylor estimate that GDP from Idaho farming, adjusted for inflation, increased 142 percent during that time, while total Idaho GDP increased 81 percent.

"That's a remarkable number,"
Taylor said. "And that number doesn't include food processing. That's just from farming: grandma and grandpa on a tractor." ■

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Photo by Steve Ritter

Gov. Brad Little addresses Farm Bureau members Feb. 12 during Idaho Farm Bureau Federation's annual "Legislative and Commodity Conference."

# Ag conference

# Farm Bureau members meet, dialogue with lawmakers

'The conference allows Farm Bureau members to have honest discussions with lawmakers about issues that affect agriculture while the legislative session is in full swing.'

 Bryan Searle, IFBF President and a Shelley farmer **By Sean Ellis** 

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE — Sixty-three of Idaho's 105 legislators attended Idaho Farm Bureau Federation's annual "Legislative and Commodity Conference" Feb. 12-13.

Gov. Brad Little and several Idaho legislators spoke to IFBF members about a variety of issues important to the state's agricultural community.

Several leaders of the state's agricultural industry attended the event, which included breakout commodity forums where issues affecting several of the state's main farm and

livestock commodities were discussed.

Members of Idaho's congressional delegation addressed IFBF members during a conference call and provided updates on national issues that could impact agriculture.

"The conference allows Farm Bureau members to have honest discussions with lawmakers about issues that affect agriculture while the legislative session is in full swing," said IFBF President Bryan Searle, a Shelley farmer.

During a strolling buffet dinner Feb. 12, Farm Bureau members were able to sit down with their elected officials and have up-close conversations about various issues.

Searle said the opportunities to dialogue with lawmakers allow Farm Bureau's grassroots members, who developed IFBF's policies, to educate legislators about those policies and promote and defend them.

"Legislators and Farm Bureau don't always agree on every issue but it helps keep the state's agricultural industry healthy when we can sit down with them and have a direct dialogue," he said. "Building good working relationships with all of our elected officials is critical in promoting and defending our policy."

Little, a rancher from Emmett, told IFBF members that the first two executive orders he signed, on Jan. 31, are aimed at reducing regulatory burdens on businesses.

That includes the Red Tape Reduction Act, which requires state agencies to repeal two existing rules for every one rule they propose. The governor also signed the Licensing Freedom Act of 2019, which includes recommendations to improve, modify or eliminate licensing requirements or other regulatory burdens.

Little said the orders are meant to embed into the consciousness of state agencies "that rules on top of rules on top of rules are a barrier, particularly to small businesses," a comment that drew applause from Farm Bureau members.

The governor said he would work



Photo by Steve Ritter

Farm Bureau members participate in a commodity forum during Idaho Farm Bureau Federation's annual "Legislative and Commodity Conference."

with IFBF and legislators to find ways to improve the transportation infrastructure that farmers, ranchers and other Idaho businesses rely on to move their products to markets in an efficient and timely manner.

"We're going to work on that going forward," he said.

Following Little's presentation, Searle said, "We appreciate our relationship with Governor Little and we look forward to working with him to make agriculture better and stronger."

During separate presentations to Farm Bureau members, several lawmakers also thanked the group's members for working with them to address important issues.

"I want to thank Farm Bureau for all the work they've done over the years to keep Idaho and America safe for agriculture and entrepreneurs," said Sen. Steve Vick, R-Dalton Gardens, the assistant majority leader in the Senate.

Rep. Marc Gibbs, a Republican farmer from Grace, said it's more important than ever for the state's farming and ranching industry to speak with a unified voice.

As Idaho continues to grow rapidly, the number of people and lawmakers involved in agriculture are shrinking in relation to the total population, he said.

"It's vitally important that those of us in agriculture speak with one voice," he said.

During the conference, Searle credited Farm Bureau members for the success Idaho Farm Bureau and American Farm Bureau have had over the years.

"American Farm Bureau just celebrated it's 100th year and Idaho Farm Bureau is celebrating its 79th year," he said. "The organizations have survived because of the grassroots."

Searle said the commodity forums held during the event provide an opportunity for people appointed to IFBF's commodity committees to meet and discuss their concerns with other members.

"This input coming from grassroots provides the opportunities to
make sure we are promoting our policy and also create any needed new
policies," he said. ■

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Photo by Chris Schnepf

Forest fires are a fact of life in western forests but the knowledge and resources are available to help modify homes and forests to reduce the risk and the impacts of many of those fires.

# 'Could it happen here?'

# Tools for reducing forest fire risks



By Chris Schnepf University of Idaho

It was impossible to watch all the media coverage of the California fires last year, with many homes and forests burning, and not be moved.

When large destructive fires like this hit, people have a natural desire to put some meaning to it. A variety of voices spoke of the changes in climate as being the culprit. Some pointed to fuel build-ups that were

heavier than those forests had historically.

Others pointed to people moving into parts of the landscape that were very fire prone, and suggested it was only a matter time before homes burned in forest fires. As with so many things, all these explanations for the impact of the fires contain some truth.

In addition to sympathy for Californians, many Northwest residents couldn't help but ask, "Could it happen here?"

The short answer to that question is,

those kinds of fires can and most likely will happen here, in degree.

Fire has always been a big part of most Inland Northwest forests and, to a lesser degree, coastal forests.

Different types of Northwest forests had different types of fire regimes. On the driest, lowest elevation forests, regular surface fires (every 5-10 years) maintained open stands of ponderosa pine with some Douglas-fir.

Moving to more moist forest types, fire regimes were more complicated. Many fires were mixed severity fires where fire would burn along through the surface fuels in some areas, but climb up into tree crowns in other areas and kill whole stands of trees.

Most of our forests have more stems per acre than they had historically and more understory fuels. Our forests also often have more shade tolerant species than they did historically (more Douglas-fir on drier sites, and more grand fir, cedar, and hemlock on more moist forest types). Shade-tolerant trees tend to keep more branches lower in the forest canopy, so it is easier for fires to rise into canopies and become stand replacing fires.

We have become progressively better at putting out forest fires since 1910, but in recent decades western forest fires have begun outstripping our ability to put them out promptly. Add in warmer, longer fire seasons, and the situation only gets worse. Some of the climate models have us getting wetter as well as drier, but if that precipitation still comes in the winter and since we have longer growing seasons, that adds up to moisture stress and higher fire danger in the late summer and fall.

For a meaty analysis of climate effects on forests in Idaho and the Northern Rockies, see a new U.S. Forest Service publication titled, "Climate Change Vulnerability and Adaptation in the Northern Rocky Mountains."

The good news is that there are things we can do to

reduce risk associated with these fires. Risks to individual homes can be decreased by removing fuel ladders in home landscapes, and by modifying homes so that embers flying in from wildfires are less likely to find a place to ignite the home.

The University of Idaho has an excellent extension publication on this titled, "Protecting and Landscaping Homes in the Wildland/Urban Interface," which provides practical steps to reduce the fire-associated risks to homes in rural forested areas.

Reducing fuels and stand density outside the immediate vicinity of the home is also important, and thinning the surrounding forest can also reduce insect and disease issues. To that end, two Pacific Northwest Extension publications can be helpful.

"Reducing Fire Risk on Your Property" is a workbook that helps forest owners reduce wildfire damage potential while improving forest health and wildlife habitat.

To look at a larger landscape scale, you may be interested in "Planning and Implementing Cross-boundary, Landscape-scale Restoration and Wildfire Risk Reduction Projects," a profile of the process the Klamath-Lake Forest Partnership used to plan and implement cross-boundary restoration projects to improve forest health and reduce fire risk on a landscape scale.

Forest fires are a fact of life in western forests, and with current fuel accumulations and changing climates, we are likely to see fire in the news more rather than less. Thankfully, we have knowledge and resources to help us modify homes and forests to reduce the risk and the impacts of many of those fires.

Chris Schnepf is an area extension educator in forestry for the University of Idaho in Bonner, Boundary, Kootenai and Benewah counties. He can be reached at cschnepf@uidaho.edu.

# Top Farm Bureau Agents

Agent of the Month



Rob Ellis, Twin Falls County

## Rookie of the Month



Dylan Pease, Canyon County

## Region of the Month



Magic Valley Scott Badger, Regional Executive



Jerome County Historical Society photo

The Lickley Barn and homestead on display at the Idaho Farm and Ranch Museum.

# Farm legacy

# Magic Valley farmers transformed once uninhabitable ground into productive farm land

### By Erica Louder

For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

JEROME — "A vast, uninhabited solitude, with precipitous cliffs and yawning ravines—a land where no man permanently will reside."

So said Washington Irving of the Snake River Plains in 1837.

Irving's prediction remained true until near the turn of the century, when Congress passed the Carey Act, which permitted private companies to construct, and profit from, irrigation systems in Western semi-arid states.

This led to the expansion of farming in the West, particularly in Idaho.

In 1900 the Twin Falls Land and Water Co. was formed and in 1905, the Milner diversion dam was completed. These irrigation projects in southcentral Idaho, an area that later became known as the Magic Valley, were some of the most successful of the time and they transformed the "uninhabited solitude" of Irving's musing to productive farm ground, "as if by magic."

That magical transformation is how the Magic Valley got its name.

That was the beginning of agriculture in Jerome County and the six-county region known as the "Magic Valley." If you drive west through Idaho along Interstate 84, you will see the remnants of a sagebrush desert.

However, you will also witness the culmination of 100



Jerome County Historical Society photo

Old farm equipment on display at the Idaho Farm and Ranch Museum.

years of work by the region's farmers. There are acres of potatoes, sugar beets, and beans. There are dairy farms, cattle ranches, and fields of wheat and corn silage.

Grain bins, potato cellars, sugar factories, and creameries are scattered throughout the valley. Once inhabitable ground, it is now some of the most productive ground in the Northwest.

Stay on the interstate until you reach U.S. Highway 93, Exit 173. At the junction of 93 and I-84 is hidden a remnant of that early time in the region's history. It is a living museum operated by the Jerome County Historical Society.

Aptly named IFARM, which stands for Idaho Farm and Ranch Museum, it is a treasure trove of agriculture archeology.

"IFARM is the compilation of years of collecting antiques and historical artifacts by Jerome County resi-

dents," says the museum's curator, Linda Helms. "And since Jerome County's history is entrenched in agriculture, much of those artifacts are farm related."

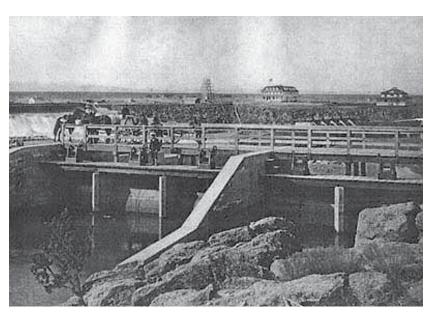
"As the farm artifacts grew," she says, "we knew we needed to find a permanent home — in 1990 we contracted with the Bureau of Land Management for 30 acres of desert ground, and IFARM was born."

They call it a museum, but to most patrons, it is more than a collection of objects on display. Visiting IFARM is like stepping back in time, to the time when the irrigation projects first breathed life to the desert, a time when farming in Jerome County took more than a little grit and an awful lot of luck.

IFARM boasts one of the largest collections of historical agriculture machinery in the Northwest — implements, plows, and early model tractors litter the ground.

The original home and barn of the Lickley family now

'Visiting IFARM is like stepping back in time, to the time when the irrigation projects first breathed life to the desert, a time when farming in Jerome County took more than a little grit and an awful lot of luck.'



 $\label{thm:county} \textit{Jerome County Historical Society photo} \ \textit{The gates of the North Side Canal at Miler Dam}.$ 

sit on the property. The Lickleys were some of the first residents of Jerome County.

There is an original barrack from the Minidoka Interment Camp, the first cabin in the city of Jerome, and a log-hewn building from the county's "Poor Farm," which



was established by the Idaho territorial governor to provide a place for the poor to live and work.

The buildings and equipment are arranged in such a way that one really gets the feel of an early 20th century desert farm.

On the second Saturday in June IFARM becomes the backdrop to an educational experience about the region's legacy during an event called "Life History Days."

During the one-day event there are antique tractor pulls, horse-drawn wagon rides, and model railroads to enjoy. A replica general store, post office, and doctor's office are in working order, staffed with actors ready to help a busy farm wife with her errands.

On the Lickley homestead, patrons can eat fresh churned butter on homemade bread, test their hand at loom weaving, and get a taste for interior décor on a desert farmhouse. You can wander freely through acres of farm equipment and implements, all the while getting a sampling of what it would have been like to homestead such a place.

When discovering this history, it is easy to romanticize the life of those early settlers. The efforts portrayed at IF-ARM are remarkable; however, they didn't come without cost

Despite the descriptor, it was not magic or even magical. Often, it was hard, backbreaking work with little rest and less reward. The land was unforgiving but, eventually, it did work and farms and people began to thrive.

Today, Magic Valley farms are proof that those early efforts did pay off. While the cliffs and ravines remain, the "inhabitable solitude" is a distant past.

To schedule a tour of IFARM contact the Jerome County Idaho Historical Society at (208) 324-5641 or through email at info@historicaljeromecounty.com. ■

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# Three things to consider when contracting commodities

he only thing everyone seems to want to talk about right now is the trade talks with China. I will agree that this is important; however, I don't (and neither do you) have control over whether or not an agreement is done and just what we agree to.

So as usual we are all worrying about one more thing that we don't have any control

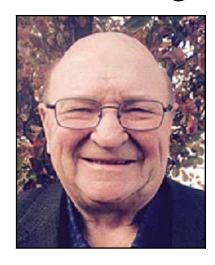
over. That's just who we are and how we think.

Now let's visit about something we can control and that is when we contract our commodities. Let's ask ourselves what the signals are that we need to watch for when making these decisions. In my opinion, there should be three factors in our decision-making process. These are not listed in order of importance.

The futures market: what are the fundamental numbers (supply/demand), is there a carry charge market? Have you looked at the historical trends for the specific futures market you're trading and then have you looked at the technical indicators to see if we are looking a technical strength or weakness?

The local basis: is the current level good or is it low? Do we historically see the basis strengthen or weaken over the next few months and at what level or time frame do I want to lock in my contract?

The cash bid: at the current level,



will I be profitable and if not, what could I do to help myself be profitable? Do I need to separate the futures and basis and trade them separately in order to maximize my opportunity to be profitable?

I realize that these questions may not be your

questions but I do feel that you need to be asking yourself these or similar questions when marketing your commodities. All too often, we visit with producers that are marketing their commodities simply because a payment is due or now is convenient for them to deliver.

As important as these questions are, they should never be at the top of our marketing checklist. Taking advantage of the futures and basis and contracting based on these two factors isn't difficult but it will take a little time and effort.

We will be willing to help you through this process on an individual basis right in your office or home. All we need to do is set up a time to sit down and get started.

Let me give you an example of separating the futures and basis and just how that has the potential to benefit your bottom line.

Last August, the Chicago 2019 wheat futures were trading as high as \$6.12 so let's not take the high but just say we were able to sell our futures at \$5.90. Using the current basis for new crop we could fix a new crop soft white contract at \$5.05 per bushel in southeast Idaho. When we compare this to the current futures market using the same basis level we get a new crop bid of \$4.50 per bushel.

Back at the timeframe I chose to use on the futures, the Relative Strength Index was at 56. This is a level where you all could have at least started to look at marketing your 2019 crop, even though we were still a year away from harvesting that crop. When you use these tools, you have the opportunity to begin pricing your commodities even when the local elevator doesn't have a bid.

Recently in a conversation with one of the large flour mills in our region the question was posed to them: Over the next five years, what will producers need to be doing in order to stay profitable in the wheat industry? The answer was, they will need to be hedging their commodities.

There will be opportunities to price your wheat or at least price the futures side of your commodity in the next few months. Let's be ready to do this by learning just how futures and basis can work together in your final price.

You may choose to never use these tools but it would be wise to know just how they work. Then you will be making your decision whether or not to use them based on what you know.

Clark Johnston is a grain marketing specialist and owner of JC Management Co. of Ogden, Utah. He can be reached at clark@jcmanagement.net. ■



Photo by Bill Schaefer

J.C. Price, right, and Carson Price, stand by a wood fence that runs along their property line. The Bear Lake County farmers have struggled to keep elk from eating their crops and damaging fencing and other material.

# Creative solutions

# Southeast Idaho farmers struggle with elk depredation

By Bill Schaefer

For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

GENEVA — Farmers in the southeast corner of Idaho near the Wyoming border are experiencing increasing depredation of their crops by elk herds and they're frustrated by the combination of growing financial losses and increasing numbers of elk in their area.

While there are regions in Idaho with low elk herd populations, such is not the case in the Idaho Department of Fish and Game elk management zones of 76 and 66A, which together form what is known as the Diamond Creek elk zone.

Between 2015 and 2017, three farmers in an area around Geneva have filed depredation claims with IDFG totaling \$61,670.

IDFG has a policy to reimburse private landowners, farmers, ranchers, fruit growers or even beekeepers, for financial losses caused by wildlife. The Idaho legislature in 2017 passed a bill that increases IDFG's financial resources to compensate for wildlife damage to crops and forage.

Zach Lockyer, IDFG's Southeast Region wildlife population manager, said there are just over 5,000 elk wintering in the Diamond Creek elk zone. Lockyer estimates that 2,860 of them are cow elk and he said he would like to see the cow elk population at 2,200.

The Geneva elk herd is estimated to be 600 and is counted as part of the Diamond Creek population.

"We recognize we've got a problem here," Lockyer said about the Geneva herd. "There's not one thing that is going to fix it. We're going to have to be creative and it's probably going



Photo by Bill Schaefer

Carson Price, right, and J.C. Price stand by one of their hay storage barns. They use green tin roofing to prevent elk from feeding on the hay.

to have to be a combination of creative depredation hunts (and) kill permits (and) there's going to have to be a variety of measures to get those elk to a point where they're tolerable for the landowners."

Carson Price and his son, J.C. Price, are a little frustrated and aggravated with elk herds feasting on grain and hay on their 1,800 acre farm.

He and his son grow 500 acres of alfalfa, 300 acres of meadow hay, 200 acres of oats and 200 acres of barley, with the remaining acreage in pasture for 50 head of cattle that J.C. Price raises.

Carson Price received \$11,460 in 2017 for a depredation claim from IDFG and he recently filed a claim for just under \$15,000 for losses in 2018.

He said the financial compensation covers the operation's crop loss but it doesn't always cover the ancillary losses incurred by damage to his fencing and other materials.

"On top of that we have customers, repeat customers, and if we don't supply them with hav they have to go someplace else to get it," said J.C. Price. "If we can't meet our customers' needs then that hurts long term as well as short term."

The elk come down from the mountains in July and August and feed on the grain in the fields prior to harvest and the start of hunting season. The elk continue to feed on stored bales of alfalfa and grain hay through the winter months on the Price farm.

"It's good to have a herd of elk around but we have too many," Carson Price said. "I don't have a problem with having elk around, I have a problem with them eating me out of house and home."

Price would like to see IDFG combine hunts to allow hunters with a bull elk tag to take a cow elk if they can't find a bull. "Fish and Game has been very good at selling tags but now we have to convince Fish and Game to start harvesting along with selling tags," he said.

Rao Tueller is a dry land farmer who grows primarily alfalfa on about 400 acres. He has filed depredation claims the past three years totaling \$11,410.

Tueller would like to have winter hunts when the elk are present.

"It's the cow population that needs to go down," he said.
"There's way too many cows. There's not many hunters who want cows."

He said access to elk is a problem because during the hunting season the elk tend to seek refuge on private property where hunting is not allowed. In a recent meeting in Montpelier with farmers and ranchers on this issue, Merritt Horsmon, IDFG's Southeast Region wildlife biologist, said that an additional factor that has compounded IDFG's elk management strategy is that some large landowners don't allow hunting on their property and the elk use that property as a refuge between sunrise and sunset, the legal time for hunting.

"There's very little movement of those elk except from ten at night to four in the morning," Horsmon said. "Hunters are our best tool but we may have to get farther out of our normal box in thinking to get those elk that are doing the damage."

He said the first step in depredation prevention is hazing the wildlife to keep them off the property.

However, he added, hazing hasn't worked with the Geneva herd and the next step is lethal removal of elk from the property through depredation hunts, landowner permission hunts or greenfield hunts, which are early hunts, before the regular hunting season.

Depredation hunts have been used in zones 76 and 66A but neither LPH or greenfield hunts have been used previously.

Horsmon would like to strategically kill elk when they first come into the fields in late July and early August.

"We know exactly the elk we want to kill then and they're there," he said. "We talked about the LPH and the greenfield hunts and I think that those would be the tools we need to use. We've used greenfield hunts in other parts of the state and they've been highly successful in reducing elk numbers and depredation."

John Guthrie, IDFG's landowner and sportsman coordinator for the Magic Valley region, said that he has seen "pretty decent success rates" using landowner permission hunts in elk management zones 44, 45 and 49 in the Magic Valley region.

"They are very surgical," Guthrie said of the success of landowner permission hunts in lowering elk populations.

IDFG's bi-annual review of wildlife rules and regulations is this spring and Toby Boudreau, IDFG assistant chief of wildlife, said his department will be looking at any and all ways to solve the overpopulation of elk in specific areas around the state.

The bi-annual review will include public meetings around the state.

Following a public comment period on proposals to address issues, IDFG commissioners will then set up new rules and regulations for the next two years.

"I get the frustration that they're expressing," Lockyer said of the impacted landowners in the Diamond Creek area. "We very much recognize that they're in a tough spot and we're going to help as much as we can."

He said IDFG's best tool for reducing a population that is over objective is hunter harvest.

"So, this year we'll be looking at some additions to the hunting seasons, not just in Geneva but in the whole zone, to allow people to harvest more elk," he said. ■





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Photo by Joel Benson

Shalani Wilcox, shown here at her family farm in Menan, won the inaugural Idaho Farm Bureau State High School Discussion Meet Jan. 25,

# Wilcox wins high school discussion meet

By Paige Nelson

For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

"That was one of the best, if not the best, opening statements I've ever heard," said an audience member after watching Shalani Wilcox compete in the first-ever Idaho Farm Bureau State High School Discussion Meet. "She's a natural," replied another.

Wilcox, a senior at Madison High School in Rexburg, was named discussion meet winner Jan. 25 at the 2019 Idaho Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers Leadership Conference.

The discussion meet is meant to simulate a committee meeting and not a panel discussion and the burden is on the competitors to moderate themselves and engage each other in a cooperative manner.

Wilcox, who represented the YF&R's district 2, was awarded a \$1,400 scholarship for her efforts.

The competition against the three other high school students from around the state – Jakeb Garrard from Cassia County in district 3, Katie Latham from Ada County in district 4 and Cassie Moedl from Franklin County in district 1 – was fierce.

"I was nervous because I knew that my competitors had also each won their district competition, but then at the same time, I knew the level of discussion would be high," Wilcox said of the state competition.

## Preparation

Wilcox's parents, Ron and Kerry Wilcox, both serve on the Madison County Farm Bureau board. Ron is the treasurer and Kerry is a committee member. In November 2018, they began encouraging Wilcox to compete at the district 2 discussion meet.

"At first I wasn't very excited about it. I didn't want to do it, and they convinced me that it would be a good idea," said Wilcox.

While her parents were working on her from home, her Sunday school teacher, Alan Clark, district 2 vicechair and a former young farmer and rancher discussion meet competitor, was giving her the third degree at church.

"He kept telling me that I needed to do it," Wilcox remembered. "Every week he'd say, 'Hey, you going to do the discussion meet?"

Finally, Wilcox was persuaded to enter her first discussion meet, which would be at the district level. The competition date was set for Jan. 17, just one week prior to the state compe-

To prepare, Wilcox studied each of the three questions, organized a few personal examples to use during the discussion and watched several videos of past competitions.

"I wrote a paper for myself that had different answers and different topics that I could talk about during the discussion meet," she said.

At the state competition only one question would be discussed, so Wilcox did in-depth study on that question. She used different resources, and she watched the video of national discussion meet competitors discussing that question.

"That was very beneficial," she said.

### Competing

A discussion meet is designed to simulate a committee meeting. All ideas are welcome but competitors must work together to reach a few conclusive solutions by the end. The winner is chosen by their ability to direct the discussion in a productive and fair way.

While many of this year's participants were FFA members, the Idaho State High School Discussion Meet is open to all high school students.

Wilcox admits that even after all her preparation, she really didn't know what to expect during her first round at the district meet.

"I just added my two cents when I thought it was necessary," she recalled. "By the second round I had kind of figured out more of what I was supposed to do. I was able to be a little bit more competitive and ended up making it into the finals."

At the state discussion meet, the students were asked to discuss this topic: "Farmers are a shrinking percentage of



Photo by Joel Benson Shalani Wilcox, speaking, Jakeb Garrard, Katie Latham and Cassie Moedl compete in the inauaural Idaho Farm Bureau State High School Discussion Meet Jan. 25. Wilcox won the event.

the population. How can Farm Bureau help first-generation farmers and ranchers get started in agriculture?"

In her opening statement Wilcox responded with: "Some say these days the only way to get into farming is by the womb, tomb or the altar. In talking about this problem, one of my friends has said her only option at this point is to develop a profile on Farmersonly. com."

Wilcox said what made this statement work was the personalization that came from referencing her friend. She believes using personal stories during the discussion brings solutions and talking points closer to home.

"Personal stories are always more attention grabbing. It helps the judges realize that this person knows what they're talking about and that they know how to apply it in a real-life situation," she said. "It also helps ignite your passion about the topic."

#### Advice

As an FFA district president, and the Madison chapter student advisor, Wilcox is used to leading, yet she admits competing in a discussion meet seems intimidating.

Once you're up there doing it, though, she said, it becomes less intimidating and actually fun. A good way to practice, she said, is by talking with peers.

"We always eat lunch out at the ag building, a bunch of us FFA kids," she said. "That's kind of what [the discussion meet] was like. You just talk about different subjects; sometimes it's about agriculture, sometimes it's not about agriculture. It was just like talking to friends about different subjects just more in a directed way."

Wilcox encourages FFA students to look at the Farm Bureau discussion meet as a way to prepare for similar FFA events, like the speaking events.

Competing and winning at district and state level has earned Wilcox \$1,650 toward her college education.

But aside from the scholarship and FFA practice opportunities, Wilcox believes the discussion meet offers a personal development benefit to participants.

"It's always good to be aware of different agriculture issues that are going on in the world and in the community," she said.

Research them, develop an opinion, even come up with possible solutions that you think are beneficial, and you will walk away a better person, she added.

Paige Nelson is a freelance writer from Rigby and serves as Idaho Farm Bureau Federation's district 2 young farmer and rancher chair.

# Report: Idaho No. 1 in per capita wine consumption

'The industry has grown

tremendously and it's

doing well.'

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO — Idaho's wine industry was both excited and somewhat skeptical of a recent study that claims Idahoans drink more wine per capita than residents of any other state.

"My first reaction was, 'Wow, this is awesome," said Moya Shatz-Dolsby, executive director of the Idaho Wine Commission, which represents the state's wineries and wine grape growers. "My second reaction was, 'Is it really true?"

According to a report by the National Institutes of Health, Idaho is the No. 1 state in the nation in wine consumption per capita.

"That's cool," Caldwell winemaker and wine grape grower Ron Bitner said of the ranking. "But do I believe it? I think it needs further investigation."

Gregg Alger, who owns a vineyard and winery in Caldwell, said the publicity surrounding the report's ranking of Idaho as the top

wine-consuming state in the nation is great for the industry regardless of whether the ranking is accurate or not.

"It's good publicity," he said. "It keeps the conversation alive about the wine industry in Idaho."

Alger had his event manager post a story about the ranking on Facebook and it quickly went viral.

"We've had an unbelievable amount of people respond to it," he said.

Shatz-Dolsby said the ranking has created an enormous amount of buzz.

"The media traction we got with it is so cool," she said. "I'm not going to argue with" the ranking.

The website VinePair, which broke down data from the NIH report to rank each state's overall and per capita wine consumption, said Idaho's ranking as the top wine consuming state was the first thing that stood out.

The ranking "doesn't jive with commercially collected data but it cannot be dismissed, as the number of wineries in Idaho has been growing rapidly in recent years," a VinePair article stated.

The number of wineries in Idaho has grown from 11 in 2002 to 52 now.

Since 1976, when there was one winery in Idaho, the

industry has grown significantly.

Ron Bitner.

Idaho produces about 225,000 16-bottle cases of wine each year and according to a study commissioned by the IWC, the industry has a \$169 million impact on the state's economy.

"The industry has grown tremendously and it's doing well," said Bitner.

It was fun to see Idaho ranked as the top wine consuming state in the nation but it would be even more exciting to be able to increase the market share for Idaho wine, said vineyard and winery owner Mike Williamson, an IWC commissioner.

The market share for Idaho wine - the amount of wine sold in Idaho that is produced in

Idaho - hovers around 10 percent.

Increasing the market share of Idaho wine has been a major focus of the commission and finding out how to increase it even more is the next step, he said.

"Now that we know people are Caldwell winemaker drinking wine in Idaho, that is the next question," he said.

Or, as Shatz-Dolsby put it, "If our market share is 10 percent, that means there is still a lot of other wine being consumed in the state that is not Idaho wine."

According to VinePair, the NIH considered alcoholic beverage sales by state from 1977-2015 and then updated their records with 2016 figures.

According to the NIH report, California consumes the most wine overall, which is no shocker since that state's population of 39 million people is far greater than any other state.

But Idaho, which has a population of 1.7 million people, is far ahead of California when it comes to wine consumed on a per capita basis. According to the report, Idaho residents consume an average of 1.19 gallons per person each year, compared with 0.59 gallons for California.

The average wine consumption per year for all of the United States was 0.44 gallons, according to the NIH report.

How states that border Idaho ranked in the NIH report: Utah consumed an average of 0.19 gallons of wine per capita, Wyoming 0.32 gallons, Montana and Washington 0.52, Oregon 0.6 and Nevada 0.61. ■

# Caribou County residents explore rangeland fire protection association

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

SODA SPRINGS – Some people in the Soda Springs area are gauging the community's interest in forming a rangeland fire protection association.

An RFPA is a voluntary, nonprofit organization that is qualified to help state and federal agencies suppress range fires.

Caribou County Farm Bureau held a meeting in Soda Springs Jan. 10 to educate people about RFPAs and gauge their interest in forming one.

"We're trying to educate our community about these associations so if people want to form one, they can," said Reed Crandall, a rancher who is leading the effort.

Idaho's first RFPA was formed by a group of Mountain Home ranchers in 2012. Since then, eight other RFPAs have formed across southern and eastern Idaho. They mostly consist of ranchers and farmers who are trained and qualified to assist state and federal firefighters respond to range fires.

Combined, they protect 1.8 million acres of private rangeland that was previously unprotected and they also provide secondary protection on 7.2 million acres of federal and state land.

In 2018, these RFPAs responded to 54 fires.

During the Jan. 10 meeting, Mike Guerry, a rancher from Castleford in the Magic Valley area, said RFPAs have been a big blessing to ranchers in his area.

Guerry is a member of both the Three Creek and Saylor Creek RFPAs, which formed in 2013, and he is chairman of Three Creek.

Guerry said that from 2005 to 2012, there were seven different fires of more than 100,000 acres, the effects of which severely hampered his and other ranching operations.

"It was bringing our operation to its knees," he said.

In the six years the Three Creek and Saylor Creek RF-PAs have been in place, there have been no range fires over 60,000 acres, he said.

"Its brought some stability to our operation," he said of the fact there hasn't been any huge range fires since the RFPAs formed. "I'm just a microcosm of the whole thing. That's true of everybody."

Guerry said his RFPA stands ready to help Caribou County residents form their own if they choose to. That could include providing a template for bylaws and agreements with state and federal agencies.

"We are here to help in any way ... so you don't have to reinvent the wheel," he said.

After an RFPA forms as a non-profit organization, it enters

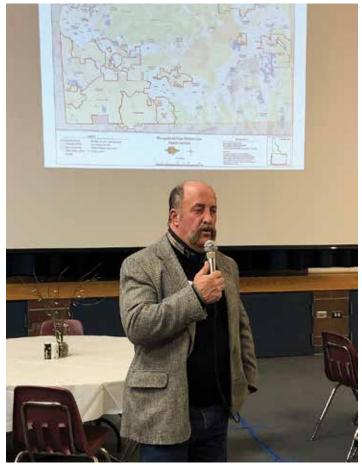


Photo by Sean Ellis

Mike Guerry, a rancher from Castleford, speaks to Caribou County residents Jan. 10 during a meeting held to explore the community's interest in forming a rangeland fire protection association.

into a cooperative agreement with the Idaho Department of Lands, said Rick Finis, IDL's southern Idaho fire program liaison.

That provides the avenue for the RFPA to enter into agreements with federal agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management. The BLM provides the training that qualifies RFPA members to work in a coordinated fashion with state and federal agencies.

More than 400 RFPA members have been trained to fight range fires and as funding has been available, IDL has provided about \$700 worth of personal protective equipment for each trained firefighter.

While RFPAs assist IDL in fighting fires, they work mostly with the BLM.

See **RFPA**, page 35



Photo by Sean Ellis

Idaho FFA students from around the state mingled with legislators and farm industry leaders Jan. 28 during the annual "Cenarrusa Day on the Hill" event.

# FFA students descend on Boise for 'Day on the Hill'

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE — Hundreds of Idaho FFA students, wearing their iconic blue jackets, descended on Boise Jan. 28 for their annual "Cenarrusa Day on the

Hill" luncheon.

It kicks off a two-day event that allows FFA members to meet face-toface with lawmakers and other agricultural industry leaders and learn firsthand how public policy is developed.

It includes a leadership conference

hosted by national FFA officials.

"It's an opportunity for our students who are engaged in pursuing leadership positions in agriculture to connect with the generation ahead of them, to learn and grow ... and to continue to help Idaho agriculture,"

said Clara-Leigh Evans, executive director of the Idaho FFA Foundation.

"I want to thank you because you are the future of agriculture," Ken Dey, communications director for J.R. Simplot Co., told FFA members during the Day on the Hill luncheon, where a wave of blue jackets mingles with legislators and industry leaders.

He also reminded them that there are plenty of career opportunities in the ag industry, whether at Simplot or elsewhere.

"The opportunity in agriculture is immense," he said. "There are plenty of FFA alumni working for our company."

The event is named for former Idaho Secretary of State Pete Cenarrusa, who died in 2013 and whose 51 years in the Legislature and executive branches of Idaho government make him the longest serving public servant in state history.

He started the first ag classes at Cambridge and Carey high schools and was known as a champion of Idaho agriculture.

Mark Bietia, an ag teacher and FFA advisor at American Falls High School, said the event is a good opportunity for FFA members to establish a relationship with their elected representatives and talk about agricultural and other issues.

"This is the biggest event where students and legislators are brought together and are able to converse about the issues of the day and how they affect us all," he said.

The event is an exciting time for the students but it's also a special time for legislators, who say they are invigorated by the enthusiasm of the FFA members, Evans said.

"I think these students inspire them," she said. "A lot of times they will say, 'That was a dose of enthusiasm and motivation.' The legislators leave this event feeling like our state will be in good hands and that FFA is preparing students for leadership roles in the future."

During the luncheon, several of Idaho's elected officials and industry leaders spoke about the important role farming and ranching play in the state's economy and thanked FFA members for their support of agriculture.

"Agriculture is such an important part of the economy of Idaho," said Lt. Gov. Janice McGeachin. "The contribution that (farmers and rancher) continue to make to our state is very much appreciated."

"Agriculture is alive and strong in Idaho," said LaMar Isaak, an Idaho board member of the Northwest Agricultural Cooperative Council, which represents agricultural co-ops in Idaho and sponsors the event. "You young people are doing a great job."

On behalf of the NWACC, Isaak presented friend of the industry awards to Sen. Mark Harris, a Republican rancher from Soda Springs, and Rep. John Vander Woude, a Republican farmer from Nampa.

Honorary FFA degrees for their long-time support of Idaho FFA were presented to Rep. Mike Moyle, a Republican farmer and rancher from Star, and Sen. Carl Crabtree, a Republican rancher from Grangeville.

Continued from page 33

"Each RFPA is unique," Finis said. "It is locally run. It is not run by the state or BLM. It is run by you."

He said one of the big benefits of an RFPA is that it allows locals to respond quickly and in a coordinated fashion to help protect their own livelihoods.

"It gets a trained firefighter who knows the area on a fire quickly," Finis said. "Their strongest suit is the intelligence and information they have about the area."

Ranchers or farmers fighting range fires isn't something new. They have done that for decades.

But Finis and Guerry both said that before the RFPAs were formed, ranchers and state and federal agencies were not on the same page and their efforts weren't coordinated.

"Everybody is on the same page now," Finis said. "Now that they're working together, it is a much safer, coordinated and efficient effort."

Before the RFPAs were formed, neither side was communicating with the other, Guerry said.

"We were putting people at risk because neither side knew where the other was," he said.

Before the RFPAs were formed, there was a lot of apprehension on both sides about how the partnership would work, Guerry said. But that has changed and now a mutual trust has developed between the association members and state and federal firefighters.

"We have developed confidence in each other," he said. Many of the RFPA members have their own firefighting equipment, including water trucks, dozers and discs.

The IDL also provides the association with additional equipment that it can acquire. For example, IDL provided seven RFPAs with fire engines last year.

Interest in forming an RFPA has also been expressed in the Arbon Valley area south of American Falls as well as the Richfield area south of Hailey.

In his first State of the State address Jan. 7, Gov. Brad Little, a rancher, praised the work of the RFPAs.

"The initial attack and intel they provide on more than 9 million acres of Idaho's rangeland have given Idaho significantly improved chances against the devastation of large wildfires," he said.

Former Gov. Butch Otter, also a rancher, also gave the RFPAs an annual shout-out in his State of the State addresses.

The Idaho Legislature provided several hundred thousand dollars to help the RFPAs get started.

"We've had tremendous support from the governor and legislature and we obviously appreciate that," Guerry said.

To find out more about the RFPA effort in the Soda Springs area, call Crandall at (208) 221-0570. ■



Photo by Jake Putnam

Gov. Brad Little delivers his inaugural address outside Idaho's Capitol building Jan. 4 after being sworn in as the state's 33rd governor.

# Agriculture a main theme in State of State address

### By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE — Gov. Brad Little's first State of the State address contained a strong recognition of the important role that agriculture plays in the state's economy.

In fact, his 4,000-word address contained numerous references and shout-outs to agriculture and issues important to Idaho's farming and ranching community.

"Agriculture remains the backbone of Idaho's rural economy," Little, a Republican rancher from Emmett, said Jan. 7 during his State of the State and budget address, which kicked off the 2019 Idaho Legislature.

He also noted that agriculture "is coping with the effects of significant challenges, from commodity prices to

transportation and trade."

"As they have for generations, progressive farmers and ranchers meet these challenges by increasing their production and efficiency," said Little, who pointed out that Idaho wheat yields increased 15 percent and set a record last year, barley yields were up 10 percent from the previous year and alfalfa hay yields increased 19 percent.

He also pointed out that Idaho's dairy production has doubled in the past 16 years and that the state jumped Oregon in 2017 to become the No. 2 hop producing state in the nation.

"Idaho remains a heavily trade-dependent state, with around \$2 billion in agricultural exports," the governor said. "When markets are open, agriculture makes the most of those opportunities. When markets are disrupted, we feel it."

Little said the profitability of Idaho's farming and ranching industry "and its ability to compete nationally and internationally is dependent upon the time and cost of getting our products to consumers."

"I look forward to working with you to increase rail access, address truck shortages and reduce the burdens of federal regulations," he added.

Little, who served as lieutenant governor from 2009-2019, was raised on his family's ranch in Emmett and has been active in the state's agricultural industry his whole life.

Little's proposed fiscal year 2020 budget includes \$8 million for a new Idaho State Department of Agriculture animal, dairy and plant pathology lab.

The laboratory conducts a significant amount of testing for the state's farming and ranching industry and demand for testing services has increased substantially over the past two years.

"It has skyrocketed. We're handling it fine but it's taking everything we have," said ISDA Chief of Operations Chanel Tewalt. "There has been a huge increase in workload."

The current lab was built in 1965, has been refurbished numerous times over the years and sorely needs to be replaced, Tewalt said.

"Even aside from the increase in testing, the challenges in the lab are significant," she said. "It's old and we can not refurbish it any more than we already have."

Little's proposed budget also includes \$200,000 in ongoing funding for the state's Wolf Depredation Control Board, which also gets about \$110,000 in funding annually from both the state's livestock industry and sportsmen. The money is used to lethally control problem wolves.

The board currently gets \$400,000 in state funding each year and some of Idaho's cattle and farming groups want to keep the state's annual contribution at that same amount.

During his State of the State address, Little also said Idaho must actively work to improve broadband access, which is a major issue in many rural communities. Adequate broadband connectivity is a must to ensure Idaho can adapt to the rapidly evolving digital world, he said.

"I will work with the legislature to ensure both rural and urban Idaho are connected and well-positioned to attract and create maximum success," Little said.

The governor also addressed regulatory burdens, which is a major issue for many farmers and ranchers.

"I will issue another executive order requiring state agencies to revoke two regulations for every new regulation they want to implement," he said. "This commitment to cutting red tape will ensure we are governing with the lightest possible hand."

Little said water is the lifeblood of Idaho "and we've



Photo by Sean Ellis

Gov. Brad Little delivers his first State of the State address Jan. 7.

made great strides in protecting it." He noted that more water was added to the important Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer last year than was removed.

"While this is an impressive accomplishment, this must be an ongoing effort," he said.

The governor also gave a shout-out to the state's nine rangeland fire protection associations, which help state and federal agencies fight range fires. More than 300 ranchers and farmers are now members of those RFPAs across southern Idaho.

"The initial attack and intel they provide on more than 9 million acres of Idaho's rangeland have given Idaho significantly improved chances against the devastation of large wildfires," he said. "I want to carry over this successful wildland firefighting model to Idaho's forestland by expanding the initial attack capabilities of our loggers."

Among the businesses Little singled out as examples of the state's strong economy were BiologiQ, an Idaho Falls company that creates plastic from the excess starch produced during potato processing, and Woodgrain Millworks, a Fruitland-based company that operates sawmills and manufactures doors and windows.



Submitted photo

Sharon Moser, right, of the Jefferson County Farm Bureau Women's Committee, presents checks to finalists in the committee's annual speech contest. Ten contestants spoke on the theme, "Idaho Agriculture, Grow With Us," during the contest, which was held Jan. 31 at Rigby High School. The finalists, from right: Jaylee Rosenberg (1st place, \$100), Talon Anderson (2nd, \$75) and Brayden Thomas (3rd, \$50).

Submitted photo

RIGHT: Brayden Thomas, a sophomore at Rigby High School, earned first place in the Idaho Farm Bureau Speech Contest, which was held Feb. 1 in Rexburg. Thomas, who represented Jefferson County, was awarded \$100. He is the son of Michael and Patty Thomas of Annis.

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Need one or two handles for cross cut saw. Lewiston, Id. Call 208-743-9204.

Paying cash for old cork top embossed bottles and some telephone insulators. Call Randy. Payette, Id. 208-740-0178.

Paying cash for German & Japanese war relics/souvenirs! Pistols, rifles, swords, daggers, flags, scopes, optical equipment, uniforms, helmets, machine guns (ATF rules apply) medals, flags, etc. 549-3841 (evenings) or 208-405-9338.

Old License Plates Wanted. Also key chain license plates, old signs, light fixtures. Will pay cash. Please email, call or write. Gary Peterson, 130 E Pecan, Genesee, Id 83832. gearlep@ gmail.com. 208-285-1258.

Our Idaho family loves old wood barns and would like to restore/rebuild your barn on our Idaho farm. Would you like to see your barn restored/ rebuilt rather than rot and fall down? Call Ken & Corrie 208-530-6466.

# Free Classified ads for **Idaho Farm Bureau Members**

Ads must be received by March 15 for April Producer. Send to dashton@idahofb.org





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