

# GEM STATE **Producer**

**Idaho Farm Bureau**

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## **Agriculture Boosts Magic Valley Economy**

**New spuds  
coming, 5**

**Power of the  
Idaho potato,  
20**

**New canola  
variety, 34**

## Bright trade outlook for U.S. agriculture



**A**s the economy here and abroad slowly begins to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, America's farmers and ranchers are ready to meet increased demand both in the United States and worldwide.

There is no questioning our resilience in adapting to and meeting some of the greatest challenges we have seen. Time and again, U.S. agriculture leads the global marketplace because we can be relied on to grow the safe, sustainable products consumers want and need.

American-grown means the highest quality

to consumers worldwide, and now is the time to work together to build on our trade partnerships, open new markets and ensure American farmers can compete with other countries fairly.

When the Phase 1 trade agreement with China went into effect just over one year ago, we were on the brink of a global pandemic—none of us knowing how long it would take hold or how it would rattle economies. Still, China in 2020 imported a record \$27.2 billion in U.S. agriculture products—nearly double what it imported in 2019.

See DUVALL, page 6

## The President's Desk

By Bryan Searle

President Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

## Dam breaching proposal is a terrible idea



**M**ake no mistake about it, a proposal by Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, that would result in the removal of the four lower Snake River dams would dramatically and negatively impact Idaho agriculture and the entire state.

It would also result in higher power costs for everyone in the Pacific Northwest and forever alter, in a bad way, the region's way of life.

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation members — virtually everyone involved in agriculture in the state for that matter — were disheartened to hear that a member of the state's congressional delegation had

created a proposal that would result in those dams being breached.

Many people, including myself, were dismayed when they first heard about Simpson's \$33.5 billion proposal, which seeks to improve populations of endangered salmon by removing the four hydroelectric dams.

Let me be very clear: Our opposition is not directed toward Representative Simpson, who has accomplished some good things for Idaho during his time in office.

See SEARLE, page 7

## Inside Farm Bureau

By Zak Miller

CEO Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

## Practicing preventative maintenance



**W**hy do "breakdowns" never happen on a sunny Wednesday morning right after planting?

Actually, they do but it sure seems like they only occur after 5 p.m. on a Friday in the middle of planting or harvest when bad weather is on the horizon.

The same as, cows never get out when a horse is saddled, and in the trailer, they seem to prefer to wait until the middle of church services to make their great escapes.

Breakdowns and breakouts in agriculture are like the wind in Southern Idaho — we know they

will happen; exactly when and how badly is the only question.

But as frustrating and unavoidable as they are, good preventative maintenance can decrease their severity and frequency.

What comes to mind as standard preventive maintenance in agriculture is grease, oil, vaccines, crop scouting, nutrition, and wire. Fifty dollars worth of grease and oil can keep hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of equipment operating safely a long time.

See MILLER, page 6

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**MAGAZINE CONTACTS:**

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation  
EDITOR (208) 239-4292 • ADS (208) 239-4279  
E-MAIL: seanellis@idahofb.org  
ADS: advertising@idahofb.org  
web: www.idahofb.org

# Report: Ag has massive impact on Magic Valley economy

**By Sean Ellis**

*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

Agriculture is big business in Idaho’s Magic Valley area. As in, really big business.

A new University of Idaho study that will be released later this year will show that agriculture is responsible for 42 percent of the jobs and 59 percent of total sales in the Magic Valley, which includes Cassia, Gooding, Jerome, Lincoln, Minidoka and Twin Falls counties.

The ag industry is also responsible for 48 percent of the Magic Valley’s gross regional product, which is the total value of goods and services in the area.

Jerome County farmer Carl Montgomery said those numbers are impressive but when you consider the ag industry in southcentral Idaho, they really shouldn’t come as a big surprise.

“When you stop and think about it, almost everything in the Magic Valley is geared toward agriculture,” he said.

Still, he added, the average person in the region not connected directly to agriculture would probably be stunned by those numbers.

“Those numbers are pretty impressive (and) I don’t think the average person would imagine the impact of agriculture in the Magic Valley is that great,” Montgomery said.

The study, conducted by Steven Hines, a University of Idaho Extension educator in Jerome County, will be released later this year but Hines shared some of the data with Idaho Farm Bureau Federation.

His report, “Contributions of Agribusiness to the Magic Valley Economy,” looks at the direct impact of agriculture – farmers and ranchers selling their commodities – as well as the indirect impact, which includes forward and backward linkages.

For example, a backward linkage would include fertilizer, seed, fuel and farm equipment. A forward linkage would include food processing.

“The vibrant economy of the Magic Valley is driven by agribusiness, which includes on-farm production, ag processing and the ag services that directly support agriculture,” the report’s executive summary states.

When the total impact of agriculture in the Magic Valley is calculated, the numbers are huge and show that agriculture is by far the most important part of the region’s economy.

The report says that “agriculture in the Magic Valley ... has grown from

**COVER: This is a panoramic view of part of the Magic Valley. A new study will show that agriculture has a massive positive impact on the Magic Valley economy. See story on this page.** (Photo by Joel Benson)





Photo by Sean Ellis

**According to a study conducted by University of Idaho researchers, agriculture, led by the dairy industry, has a massive impact on the Magic Valley economy.**

family farmsteads into a giant agribusiness industry, providing wealth for the region, jobs for residents and food for national and international markets.”

According to the report, which is based on 2018 data, new money generated by agribusiness exports ripple throughout the Magic Valley economy, creating indirect economic activity for other regional businesses.

“Someone in that area might say, ag doesn’t affect me because ... I sell cars,” Hines said. “But when you start looking at those linkages and figure out where the new money is coming from that strengthens the economy, a huge amount of that ties back to agriculture.”

The report shows that agriculture contributed \$12 billion of sales in the region in 2018, \$3.6 billion of gross regional product and 43,000 jobs.

While not surprising, “Those numbers are astounding,” said U of I Agricultural Economist Garth Taylor, one of the report’s co-authors. “The Magic Valley is ... kind of a Silicon Valley of agribusiness.”

Other report co-authors include Ashlee Westerhold, an Extension economist in Twin Falls, and Joel Packham, an Extension educa-

tor in Cassia County.

The moral of the story from the report, Taylor said, “is don’t mess with ag. Let us farm and we’ll create wealth.”

The report will also show that farm-gate receipts in the Magic Valley comprised 45 percent – \$3.6 billion – of total farm-gate receipts in Idaho in 2018.

Hines said a couple of things really stand out in the report: “How important agriculture is to the Magic Valley (economy) and how much of Idaho agriculture takes place here in the Magic Valley.”

Other highlights from the report:

- Magic Valley milk production alone comprised 21 percent of Idaho’s total farm-gate receipts.
- Dairy and potato manufacturing and beef production were the largest contributors, respectively, of base sales in the Magic Valley economy.
- Virtually all (98.7 percent) of the region’s 1.07 million acres of harvested cropland are irrigated.

“It takes all kinds of business and services to support a healthy regional economy,” the report states, “but a healthy economy is grown by the base industries. In the Mag-

ic Valley, agribusiness is the primary base industry driving the economy.”

Hines conducts this report about every five years, whenever data from the most recent Census of Agriculture becomes available. The report goes to all state lawmakers, as well as to county commissioners and planning and economic development folks in the region.

Hines said he doubts most people in the region not directly involved with agriculture understand how big of an impact the industry has on the Magic Valley economy.

“Maybe if you grew up here, you might have an idea,” he said. “But as far as people who move here from other places, I just don’t think they understand. I don’t think they have a clue how important agriculture is to this area.”

Cassia County rancher Paul Marchant said he was not surprised by the report’s finding that agriculture is by far the biggest contributor to the region’s overall economy.

“What does surprise me – it bothers me a little, actually – is that a lot of people here do not realize that,” he said. “Without agriculture, our economy basically shuts down.” ■

# Two new spud varieties poised for release

By John O'Connell

*Intermountain Farm and Ranch*

Two new potato varieties with ties to USDA's Agricultural Research Service in Aberdeen are poised to be released soon by the Tri-State Potato Research and Breeding Program.

The initial cross for Rainier Russet was made at the Small Grains and Potato Germplasm Research center in Aberdeen. Oregon State University chose to retain the cross and advance it through its program and will be the lead institution behind the release, anticipated to occur later this year.

Rich Novy, the USDA-ARS potato breeder in Aberdeen, believes Rainier will be well suited for both the fresh and processed potato markets. It's a cross of Canela Russet and an Aberdeen breeding clone.

Novy said Rainier has good cold-sweetening resistance, meaning sugar levels don't tend to rise much in cold storage. Potatoes with high sugar content fry darker and aren't ideal for processing.

Fresh pack sheds should like its attractive appearance, nice shape and its lack of growth cracks or tuber bumps. Another major attribute is its high yield of marketable U.S. No. 1 tubers, Novy said.

It also has a lengthy tuber dormancy, which refers to the length of time that it can be stored before producing sprouts.

Novy said Rainier was evaluated by other partners in Idaho, Oregon and Washington before moving on to the Western Regional Trials, which also include programs in California, Colorado

and Texas.

He said Rainier has been raised in North Dakota, and certified seed is available to interested parties for expansion.

The second variety poised for release — NDA050237B-1R — is a vibrant, red clone that was crossed in North Dakota. The Aberdeen program, however, selected this specialty potato to be retained and advanced through the process.

Novy said certified seed is available, and it will likely be named and released later this year or early next year.

Novy explained that North Dakota and

Aberdeen share extra seedling tubers from their programs.

"It's got a really nice, deep-red skin color," Novy said, adding it also yields a high percentage of medium-sized tubers, which are desirable in the specialty category.

The new, red potato has garnered strong interest in Klamath Falls, Ore., as well as in Michigan, Novy said. It's medium to late in its maturation.

Varieties developed by the Tri-State program are marketed by the Potato Variety Management Institute. ■



Photo courtesy of Potato Variety Management Institute

**Rainier Russet, a new potato variety shown here, is expected to be released later this year.**

# MILLER

*Continued from page 2*

Virtually everyone knows the value of preventative maintenance, yet it is quite rare to find someone whose dream job is to grease bearings or splice breaks in a fence. For most people, preventative maintenance qualifies as the “have to” part of the job description.

Simultaneously, there are few things more comforting than knowing that the fence is stretched tight when the cows are turned out or that oil was checked when the tractor leaves the yard.

I doubt anyone has ever said, “I wish I would have skipped the maintenance.”

A good farmer or stockman is on constant guard for signs of fatigue or wear in their equipment and stock and they rarely take either for granted or assume someone else has done the maintenance for them.

The same should be true of our relationships. As humans, we often rely on each other, most times happily and sometimes grudgingly. We all need help from others.

Our relationships with others have a significant impact on the outcomes of our efforts. When we ask for help from others, it is a lot like having the wire tight and the oil checked: If we didn't care to our relationships before the need arose, a “breakdown” could be an unfortunate outcome.

Whether it be individual relationships or our relationships with our leaders, both need good preventative maintenance. When the need is high is not an appropriate time to begin a relationship.

Many County Farm Bureau boards take time to perform maintenance in their counties. Farm Bureau board meetings often include visits from state representatives,

county sheriffs, commissioners, assessors, and fish and game, Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service personnel, and many others.

Often, county Farm Bureau members may have a question or concern they want to discuss, but they may also seek to hear from others and understand their perspectives. It is these times of listening that can often lead to the greatest value later.

Preventative maintenance may not be exciting or exhilarating but sleeping through the night is also better than having to search for black cows on the road on a moonless night.

Taking the time to know those who serve us and foster relationships with them involves the same principle. When the time is needed for their help, it is doubtful anyone will regret the previous efforts to maintain that relationship. ■

# DUVALL

*Continued from page 2*

While that was more than \$6 billion off the goal set in the agreement, I would call that a success given the challenges in the supply chain and export restrictions early on.

Overall, the outlook for U.S. agriculture exports is bright, according to the USDA. We are nearly halfway through the current fiscal year, and the latest USDA trade outlook, released in February, predicts a record \$157 billion in U.S. agriculture exports—that's a \$21 billion increase from the previous fiscal year.

This is some much-needed good news for farmers and ranchers, and a hopeful sign of better days ahead.

As the Biden administration continues negotiations with our global partners and begins new conversations, expanding opportunities for America's farmers and ranchers and our rural communities must remain a top priority.

I'm glad to say that all early signs show we agree on that priority. Last week, the administration presented President Biden's trade agenda for the year, which said the president would seek to expand our global market opportunities for farmers and ranchers and enforce global agriculture trade rules.

At Farm Bureau, we look forward to

working with the new United States Trade Representative, Katherine Tai, pending her Senate confirmation, and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to see those goals achieved for a stronger farm and rural economy.

America's farmers and ranchers have repeatedly been unfairly targeted with tariffs and other trade barriers abroad.

Your American Farm Bureau has worked for decades to level the playing field with fair trade deals to help our industry be the global leader it is today. And we will continue to work with this administration to ensure new trade agreements open markets still unfairly closed off to American farm and ranch products.

Often the barriers agriculture faces in trade have nothing to do with us. We're just caught in the crossfire. Last week, the U.S. put a four-month pause on tariffs on U.K. and European Union products as a sign of good faith as we work to resolve an escalating dispute on airplane parts that has put farmers on the frontlines of the skirmish.

This is a hopeful development and perhaps the first step to forming a comprehensive trade agreement with the U.K. that is science-based and removes the non-tariff barriers to American agriculture.

The success of U.S. agricultural trade also depends on us holding trade partners ac-

countable as we implement agreements. The new USTR will need to address quickly the implementation of the USMCA, which came into effect on July 1, 2020.

USMCA put into place new trading standards and strong enforcement mechanisms. While there is some friction regarding potatoes and biotech crops with Mexico and dairy products with Canada, the USTR can use the enforcement mechanisms in the agreement to resolve issues.

As two of our largest trading partners, the strengthened partnership is paying off for farmers and ranchers. For example, exports of poultry and dairy products to Canada, which have been a sticking point between the U.S. and Canada for a long time, were up 5% in the last six months of 2020, compared to the last six months of 2019.

Building strong trade partnerships takes time, and America's farmers and ranchers understand that well. The strong outlook we're seeing for agriculture exports didn't happen overnight.

We came to the table and worked with our nation's leaders to ensure agriculture remained a priority. I am confident that together we will build on that work, and that we will continue to provide the best food, fiber and renewable fuel for customers near and far. ■



Continued from page 2

Our opposition is squarely placed on the congressman's proposal, which we believe would be bad for agriculture, bad for the environment and bad for power rates, while holding no guarantee that it would improve populations of endangered salmon.

Let me also be clear on this: Farm Bureau supports improving salmon populations.

IFBF policy, which was developed by the organization's members at the grassroots level, supports several salmon-recovery alternatives, including privatizing salmon fisheries for stronger fish; controlling predators of salmon, regulating harvest of off-shore and in-stream fish, and using new hydroelectric turbine technologies to reduce fish hazards.

But removal of the dams is a non-starter for our organization, which represents more than 80,000 member-families in Idaho, including at least 11,000 people who are actively engaged in agriculture.

IFBF policy, which was developed by Farm Bureau members at the grassroots level, supports "the continued existence and current usage of all dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers" and opposes "any efforts to destroy or decrease production of those dams."

The lower four dams on the Snake River supply a significant amount of cheap and environmentally friendly hydroelectric power to the region.

They are also a critical part of a system on the Columbia and Snake rivers that allows wheat farmers, as well as producers of many other commodities, to export their product to the world.

The river, combined with its system of dams and locks, provides for the environmentally friendly ability to transport wheat, pulse and other crops to Portland by barge so they can be shipped across the world.

Removing the dams would make the Columbia-Snake River system unnavigable for barges that move wheat, barley and other products to Portland for export.

Removing the dams would have a devastating impact on Idaho's wheat farmers, who grow that crop in 42 of the state's 44 counties. Idaho wheat growers brought in \$525 million in farm-gate receipts in 2020 and wheat is the state's No. 2 crop in that category.

Almost half of the wheat grown in Idaho is moved by barge down the Columbia-Snake River system to Portland.

Barging is the most cost-effective and environmentally friendly way of getting wheat from Idaho to market and the Columbia-Snake system is the third largest grain export gateway in the world.

According to a study commissioned by the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association, a non-profit group that represents a diverse coalition of 135 groups in Idaho, Washington and Oregon, removing the dams would significantly increase diesel fuel consumption because barges would be replaced by less efficient truck and rail shipment.

The study found that shifting transportation of commodities from barges to truck and rail would increase carbon and other emissions by more than 1.3 million tons per year. That's the same as adding 181,889 passenger cars or 90,365 homes.

According to the PNWA study, it would take about 35,000 rail cars or 135,000 semi-trucks to move all the cargo that is barged on the Snake River.

People in Idaho and the PNW enjoy some of the very cheapest power rates in the nation because of the electricity produced by those four dams and others on the Columbia-Snake system.

Removing those hydroelectric dams would result in power rates in the region increasing dramatically.

So, removing the dams would not only be bad for agriculture and bad for power rates, it would also be bad for the environment.

Simpson's proposal would create a \$33.5 billion "Columbia Basin Fund" to help transition economies and sectors negatively impacted by dam removal.

The plan attempts to place a price tag on our way of life in Idaho and the Pacific Northwest and it also attempts to compensate sectors, such as agriculture, that will be impacted by dam removal.

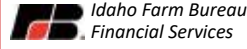
We believe attempting to place a price tag on our way of life is not possible, nor proper, and besides, farmers would rather make their living from the market and not be "compensated" by the government.

IFBF members believe that the congressman's proposal would have a major negative impact on the region's economy and way of life, while making no assurances that salmon populations would improve.

We're not the only ones. The list of people and groups opposed to the plan is growing seemingly by the day. Every other member of Idaho's congressional delegation, as well as our governor, is on record since the proposal came out as opposing dam breaching.

In addition, groups representing agriculture and other industries in Idaho have come out in opposition to the plan, as have lots of county commissioners and other elected officials. A Senate Joint Memorial opposing dam breaching is sailing through the Idaho Legislature.

We sincerely hope Congressman Simpson hears Idahoans' collective thinking on his proposal and reconsiders and scraps it, for the benefit of the entire state. ■

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Photo by Sean Ellis

A foreign agricultural guest worker here under the federal H-2A visa program prunes fruit trees in an orchard near Fruitland in 2019. The minimum wage that Idaho farmers, ranchers and other ag operations that use the program must pay H-2A workers in 2021 has increased by 93 cents an hour.

# Wage hike

## Idaho's minimum H-2A wage rate increases 7 percent

By Sean Ellis

*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

POCATELLO — The minimum wage that Idaho farmers, ranchers and other agricultural employers must pay foreign guest workers in 2021 will increase 93 cents per hour over the 2020 rate.

That means Idaho ag employers who

use foreign guest workers under the federal H-2A visa program this year will need to pay them a minimum of \$14.55 per hour, which is a 7 percent increase over last year's rate of \$13.62 per hour.

Nationwide, the 2021 rate is \$14.62, which is an increase of 63 cents per hour or 4.5 percent.

The rates became official Feb. 23.

The federal H-2A agricultural guest worker program allows farmers, ranchers and other ag operations that can't find enough domestic workers to bring in foreign guest workers to fill jobs on a temporary or seasonal basis.

Besides paying for their housing and transportation to and from the United States, farm operations that use H-2A



workers must pay them a minimum wage mandated by the federal government.

That wage, which varies by state, is determined annually by the U.S. Department of Labor based on USDA farm labor wage surveys of non-supervisory farm and ranch workers in a particular area.

The rate is known as the adverse effect wage rate or AEWR.

This year's increase in the AEWR comes on top of several similar increases in recent years and Idaho's AEWR rate has increased by 25 percent since 2016.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, ag employers in Idaho submitted 1,200 applications seeking a total of 5,600 H-2A workers in 2020.

Nationwide, ag employers use more than 250,000 H-2A workers in a given year.

Officials from companies that help Idaho ag employers file the paperwork needed to obtain H-2A workers said this year's increase will have a significant negative impact on those who use the federal guest worker program.

"It's a pretty big jump, again," said Joel Anderson, stressing the "again" part. He is executive director of the Snake River Farmers Association, a non-profit group of agricultural producers that helps members process H-2A applications.

"That's what's frustrating; it's happening year after year," he said. "At what point is it no longer sustainable for ag producers?"

Jennifer Uranga, who owns Mountain West Ag Consulting, which specializes in H-2A issues, said the almost annual considerable increases in the AEWR rate are discouraging for farmers and ranchers and other ag employers.

"I'm hearing the same things I heard the last time it went up: When is this going to stop? This isn't affordable ... It's like nobody's listening," she said. "The American farmer is saying, 'When is this going to stop because we can't afford it.'"

Even though the federal H-2A program is cumbersome and expensive, many ag employers turn to it because they can't find domestic workers anymore, Uranga said.

The farm labor situation is particularly



Photo by Sean Ellis

**A foreign agricultural guest worker here under the federal H-2A visa program prunes fruit trees in an orchard near Fruitland in 2019.**

bad in the fast-growing Treasure Valley area of southwestern Idaho, she said, and this year's AEWR increase will hit ag employers there hard.

Michael Williamson, who manages a fruit orchard near Caldwell in southwestern Idaho, has been on the verge of hiring H-2A workers for the past several years but he said this year's 7 percent increase in the AEWR rate "doesn't encourage me to do it this year."

On the other hand, he added, "If you don't have people, it's a lot more expensive to not get your harvest done."

Williamson is discussing the situation with another farmer and they are trying to determine whether it's possible and economically feasible to jointly file an H-2A application and share workers.

Anderson said many ag employers who use H-2A labor believe the AEWR rates don't accurately reflect what is happening in their area.

The USDA farm labor wage surveys used to determine AEWR rates include H-2A workers, which artificially pushes the rates up every year, he said.

"It adds those wages back to the data pool so obviously it's going to continue to go up," Anderson said. "It's an upward spiral, out of control. The rate is unsustainable and out of touch with the reality

of what is really going on on the ground with market conditions."

"The supply and demand side of things shows that these increases are not reasonable and not rational," he added. "These wages aren't in step with what local economies ... can bear."

Uranga said the formula used to determine the rates needs to be changed to reflect the reality of what is really happening with wages in particular areas.

If the cost of using the program continues to increase artificially, many farmers and ranchers won't be able to afford to stay in business and that will ultimately drive food production to other nations, she said.

"Something has to change or there will be consequences for (American agriculture)," Uranga said. Elected officials "and American consumers need to understand the consequences of where this is going."

Anderson said the impact this year's AEWR increase will have on ag employers is exacerbated by the fact that until Dec. 23, ag employers assumed the rate would be frozen during 2021 and 2022.

A new DOL rule that would have done that went into effect Dec. 21 but was halted by a court injunction two days later. The injunction was issued by a federal district court judge in California. ■



Photo by John O'Connell

Barry Jacobson cuts beef at Del Monte Meats in Pocatello. Cattle industry experts are bullish on cattle prices in 2021.

# BULLISH ON BEEF

## Cattle industry experts optimistic ranchers will see a profitable year

By John O'Connell

*Intermountain Farm and Ranch*

A leading beef industry research and analytics service is bullish on cattle in 2021, predicting a tightening supply and strong demand will contribute to a profitable year for ranchers.

During the recent CattleFax virtual 2021 Cattle Industry Convention Winter Reboot, the company's vice president of industry relations and analysis, Kevin Good, predicted prices of all cattle classes will rise this year.

For example, Good forecasts the average fed steer price in 2021 will be \$119 per hundredweight, up \$10 from last year.

The CattleFax experts anticipate the industry will benefit from pent-up demand

as more foodservice operations reopen, according to a press release issued after the convention.

Furthermore, CattleFax CEO Randy Blach cited statistics showing consumers have increased their savings amid the pandemic, raising household wealth by an estimated \$620 billion. Consumers have traditionally viewed beef as a luxury item and tend to shift to beef from chicken or pork as their income levels rise.

CattleFax officials anticipate the beef supply will tighten throughout this year and the next three or four years should all be profitable for producers.

"The bottom line is that things are on the mend, with producers gradually recapturing the margin," Good said in the press release.

The U.S. cattle herd peaked in 2019 at 31.7 million head of mother cows, according to CattleFax. The inventory dropped to 31.3 million in 2020 and is projected to further drop to 31.2 million head this year.

"It doesn't take a lot to get prices moving," said University of Idaho Extension Economist Ben Eborn.

Eborn explained the national beef herd stopped growing in 2020, once the herd size had reached the point that prices were starting to soften. Ranch expansion driven by a good market usually persists for up to four years before the cycle shifts to contraction.

"I think prices will be better this year and they'll continue to go up for the next three or four years, unless we have



some major economic crash,” Eborn said. “One thing that might not cause this to work out is if we continue to see drought expand in the western U.S.”

If drought conditions persist in the West, Eborn said, some producers may be forced to liquidate livestock, which could lead to a temporary flooding of the market.

This year, per capita beef consumption is predicted to increase by a tenth of a pound to 58.7 pounds per person.

Eborn explained consumers who had to forgo vacations, family activities and eating out throughout 2020 curbed their usual spending. Any lost revenue to unemployment was offset by government payments.

“They have all of this cash pent up and they’re ready to spend it,” Eborn said. “I think sales of beef are going to be really strong this year, and they were (strong) last year.”

Scott Steele, who has a large cattle operation north of Idaho Falls, saw evidence of consumers eager to eat prime cuts of beef at their favorite restaurants while dining out recently. He and his wife tried to get a table at a local steakhouse and ultimately left for another steakhouse when they learned the wait was more than two hours. The next restaurant also had a long wait.

“I do see some positive signs when I go out and I see huge demand and I think there’s probably a lot of pent-up demand in other parts of the country that still aren’t opened up yet,” Steele said.

Steele is also encouraged by projections of a slight reduction in the national herd.

“That’s a lot better than an expansion in the cow herd,” he said.

The industry is facing many unprecedented circumstances, however, due to the coronavirus pandemic, and despite Steele’s optimism, he still plans to hedge all of his cattle sales in the near future rather than speculating. Hedging is a marketing tool that allows producers to forward price their cattle to avoid downward price changes.

Total retail spending on meat sales rose by 18% in 2020, with beef accounting for 45% of that spending, equal to \$5.7



Photo by Sean Ellis

#### Cattle industry experts are bullish on cattle prices in 2021.

billion, according to CattleFax.

Nonetheless, many producers didn’t get to enjoy last year’s profits due to a meat packing “bottleneck.” Packing plants that had already been operating at more than 100 percent of planned capacity had to slow down processing by 10% to 20%

*“I think prices will be better this year and they’ll continue to go up for the next three or four years, unless we have some major economic crash.”*

— Ben Eborn, University of Idaho Extension Economist

last spring based on the potential for the coronavirus to spread among workers in such tight quarters.

The situation left producers with a glut of cattle and no place to process them. Meanwhile, the combination of pandemic-related retail demand and slowed processing drove meat prices to record levels in grocery store shelves.

Producers who had ample feed held onto their cattle and waited for the bottleneck to resolve itself and prices to recover.

Sara Erb, who owns the Blackfoot

Livestock Auction with her husband, Cole Erb, said many ranchers sold big cattle at the beginning of this year that would have otherwise been sold last year.

“They did fine,” Sara Erb said, adding that the market has held relatively steady recently.

Other producers got stung because of the backlog in slaughterhouses.

“Last year in March, I tried to sell some yearlings and I basically had to beg somebody to take them,” said Jim Guthrie, a McCammon rancher who also serves in the state Senate.

Guthrie isn’t convinced that U.S. households truly have more discretionary income.

“COVID has put such an unexpected variable to the equation,” Guthrie said. “When they talk about people having extra money ... it seems contrary to the reality caused by this pandemic.”

Gary Dixon, who has about 70 head of cattle in Idaho Falls, said he’s still operating at the break-even point, and he believes better returns to producers are long overdue.

See BEEF, page 14





Photo by Sean Ellis

Wheat is harvested in a field near Nampa in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo. While national wheat acres have plummeted over the past two decades, Idaho's wheat acres have remained steady.

# Idaho wheat acres stable while U.S. acres have plummeted

By Sean Ellis

*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

As national wheat acres have continued to plummet the past two decades, reaching all-time lows in 2019 and 2020, Idaho's wheat acres have remained steady.

There are several reasons for that, but according to Idaho wheat industry leaders and grain farmers, one of the main factors

is that national and international customers know that Idaho produces a consistent, quality crop almost every year.

Besides being exported to other nations, Idaho wheat is shipped to about 26 states and many customers in those states jump over other wheat-producing states to come to Idaho, says Blaine Jacobson, former executive director of the Idaho Wheat Commission.

“What really makes our crop unique is the consistency and quality,” he says. “Idaho has the most consistent crop of any wheat growing state.”

The fact that most Idaho wheat is grown under irrigation with water from the state's many reservoirs plays a big role in that, Idaho wheat industry leaders and farmers say, as does southern Idaho's dry desert climate, which keeps disease and pest issues

to a minimum compared to many other wheat producing areas.

“The irrigation infrastructure we have in Idaho obviously helps us keep a very stable production (of wheat) every year,” says IWC Executive Director Casey Chumrau.

Jacobson says Idaho has a higher percentage of its wheat crop under irrigation than any other state and the dryland wheat growing regions of the state without irrigation usually enjoy favorable rainfall.

“Year in and year out, the rain in those areas almost always comes at the right time,” he says.

Idaho’s reputation for growing a quality wheat crop annually didn’t happen by accident, Chumrau says.

Idaho’s wheat growers, through the assessment dollars they pay that fund the wheat commission, have spent a lot of money over the decades on wheat breeding and other research programs that focus on wheat quality.

Idaho growers, as well as their counterparts in the Pacific Northwest, “have a long history of investing in quality,” Chumrau says.

When it comes to wheat, she adds, “There are a lot of other states that would love to be in the position that Idaho is in. Idaho grows really high-quality wheat.”

Before 1996, wheat, corn and soybean acres in the United States were roughly the same, ranging between 62 million and 71 million each. But since that time, corn and soybean acres have continued to climb, while wheat acres nationally fell to a record low of 45.5 million in 2019 and then 44.35 million in 2020.

Total wheat acres in the U.S. in 2020 reached their lowest level since records on that statistic started being kept in 1919.

In 2020, corn for grain acres in the U.S. totaled 82.5 million and soybean acres totaled 84 million, according to USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Over the past two decades, however, Idaho’s wheat acres have remained steady at about 1.1 to 1.2 million each year, according to NASS.

Last year, Idaho farmers planted 1.24 million acres of wheat, up slightly from 1.19 million in 2019.

Wheat acres have declined in the U.S. since 1996 while corn and soybean acres



Photo by Sean Ellis

**Wheat grows in a field in North Idaho last July. While national wheat acres have plummeted over the past two decades, Idaho’s wheat acres have remained steady.**

have climbed due to a number of factors, including that corn and soybean varieties with GMO traits were commercially released in 1996 but there are no GMO wheat varieties.

Because crops with GMO traits can be easier and more profitable to grow, it makes corn and soybeans more attractive to many farmers in areas where all three crops can be grown. In addition, GMO corn and soybeans have expanded the geographic area that can produce those crops, so they have become options to farmers who historically only grew wheat.

Another major factor is that during that same period since 1996, other parts of the world, particularly Russia, went from being net wheat importers to net wheat exporters, says “Genesee” Joe Anderson, a wheat farmer in North Idaho.

Meanwhile, Idaho wheat acres have remained basically unchanged during that time.

On the one hand, says Teton grain farmer Dwight Little, soybeans aren’t grown commercially in Idaho and while some corn is produced here, most of it goes to feed cattle and Idaho corn production is minimal compared to the major corn-pro-

ducing states.

But besides that, he says, when it comes to wheat, Idaho is a state with favorable irrigation, climatic and other conditions that makes it profitable for farmers to grow the crop in virtually every segment of the state.

Wheat is grown in 42 of Idaho’s 44 counties and ranks as the state’s No. 2 crop, behind potatoes, when it comes to farm-gate receipts, which is the revenue a farmer receives for their commodity.

In most years, Idaho leads the nation or ranks No. 2 in average wheat yields.

“Wheat’s a crop that can be grown in any state in the nation, but we do have favorable weather conditions and the irrigation in Idaho to make really good yields on wheat,” Little says. “Wheat has always been a staple crop in our area, and in Idaho. There are very few places that can match our irrigated yields.”

Wheat has always been an integral part of crop rotations in most parts of the state, Anderson says.

“Wheat is a good agronomic crop rotation to go with other high-value crops in Idaho like potatoes and sugar beets,” he says. “Wheat is a great crop for this state

See **WHEAT**, page 14



# BEEF

Continued from page 11

“(Meat packers) are not sharing any more like they used to,” Dixon said. “We need more packing plants.”

According to Blach and CattleFax, profit margins should be better distributed this year, with prices improving significantly starting in the second half of 2021. Blach said the addition of many new small-scale packing plants should significantly improve packing capacity.

Further fueling demand, Blach noted foreign beef exports are expected to increase by 5% this year, mostly to Asian markets. China, for example, is poised to increase its beef imports from 120 million pounds per year to more than 300 million pounds per year during the next few years, he said.

“As the global population increases at a rate of 83 million people per year, U.S. agriculture is poised to play a key role with increasing exports,” Blach said in the press release.

Eborn believes high costs of ranching inputs such as feed could cut into beef producers’ bottom lines.

CattleFax predicts that U.S. farmers will seek to capitalize on high corn and soybean prices this season and will plant their largest combined acreage of the two crops in history.

Eborn, however, said feed prices may still remain high.

He said China has significantly increased its corn purchases recently, and a softening dollar should increase demand from the foreign export market. Furthermore, oil prices are on the rise. Corn and oil prices are linked, given that about 40% of corn is used for ethanol production.

At the start of 2021, Idaho ranchers had 2.5 million head of cattle, valued at \$2.625 billion, according to the Idaho Beef Council. Beef is second largest agricultural industry, behind only dairy, in terms of total farm-gate receipts. ■

# WHEAT

Continued from page 13

because it fits our climate and it fits our marketing opportunities.”

Idaho usually ranks between No. 5 and No. 7 nationally in total wheat production and five of the six classes of wheat are grown in Idaho. Most wheat growing states only grow one or two classes of wheat.

Because of that, Jacobson says, Idaho wheat farmers have the storage facilities to be able to segregate their wheat by variety, class and protein better than farmers in most other states.

The supply chain here can keep that wheat segregated and that makes Idaho an attractive place for customers looking to purchase wheat with certain characteristics, he adds.

“That ability to segregate wheat is a specialty that is not really matched in other states to the extent that it is here,” he says. “The fact that we can keep wheat segregated is one of the reasons that we have customers from across the county come here.” ■



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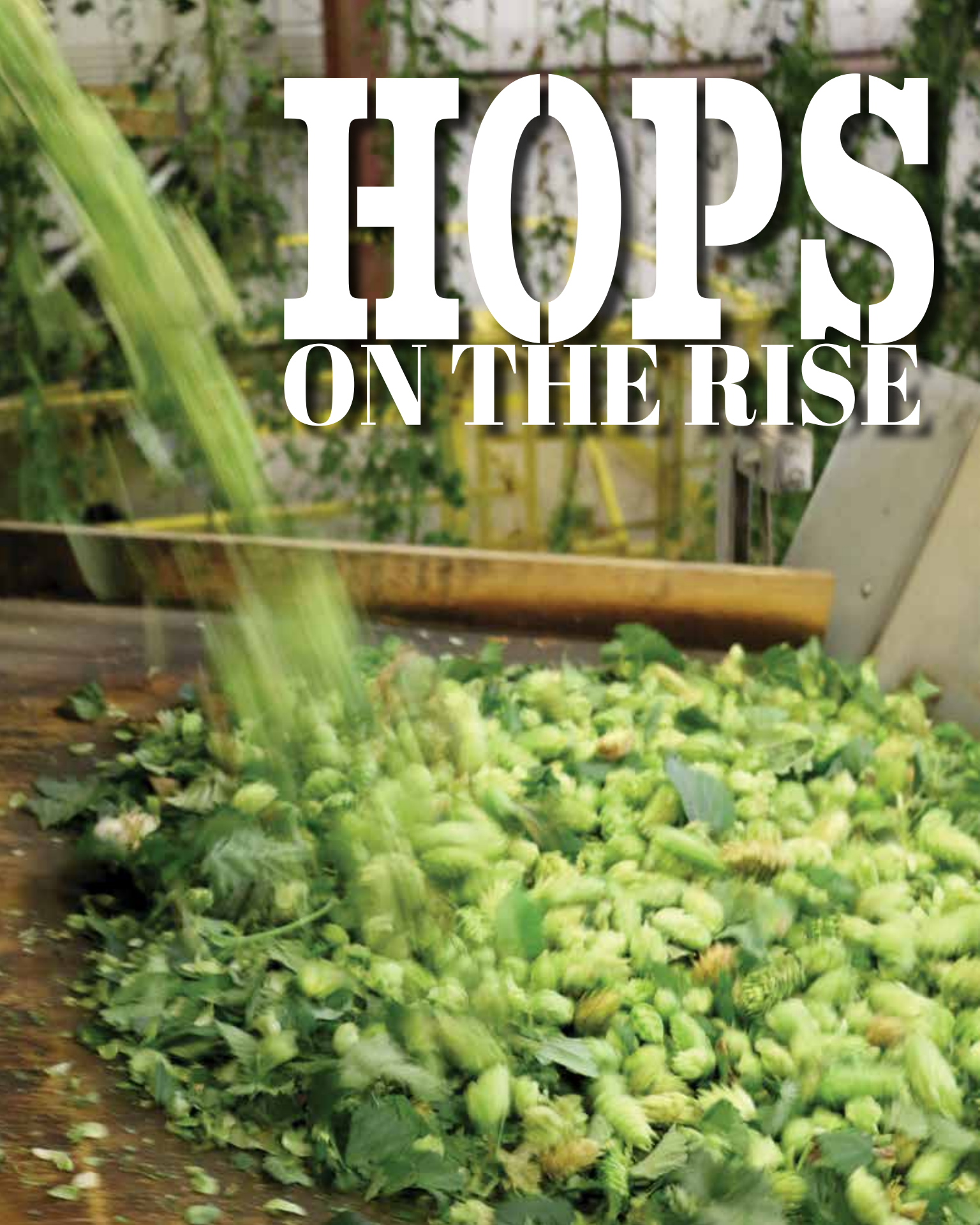
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# HOPS

## ON THE RISE







Idaho Farm Bureau Federation photo

Hops are grown in southwestern Idaho in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo. Hop production in Idaho increased for the ninth straight year, despite challenges posed by the COVID-related shutdowns and restrictions.

# Idaho hop production jumps again, despite COVID

**By Sean Ellis**

*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

POCATELLO – Despite challenges posed by COVID-related shutdowns, Idaho hop acreage and production increased again in 2020.

That's the ninth straight year hop acreage and production has increased in Idaho and the crop, once a minor part of the state's overall agricultural industry, has quickly become one of Idaho's top crops in terms of overall farm-gate revenue.

For the first time since 2012, U.S. hop production decreased this year, according to data released Dec. 22 by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service.

More than 98 percent of U.S. hop production comes from the Pacific Northwest – Washington, Idaho and Oregon – and Idaho ranks No. 2 in the nation in hop production, behind Washington.

U.S. harvested hop acreage increased 4 percent in 2020 to 58,641 acres but yields declined by 11 percent and as a result, overall production dropped from 112 mil-

lion pounds in 2019 to 104 million pounds in 2020.

Average hop yield per acre declined by 9 percent in Idaho this year, according to NASS, but harvested acreage increased 11 percent, to 9,268. That resulted in Idaho farmers producing 17.2 million pounds of hops this year, up slightly from 17 million last year.

That's no small feat considering the challenges the government-ordered shutdowns related to the COVID-19 outbreak posed to the industry.



Hops are one of the main ingredients used in beer brewing and brew pubs were hammered by the COVID-related shut-downs, said Idaho hop producer Mike Gooding.

The rapid growth in hop acres in the United States and Idaho that has occurred since 2012 has mainly been driven by the nation's fast-growing craft brewing industry.

Many brew pubs changed their plans, sometimes dramatically, when the shut-downs took effect and that resulted in hop farmers having to pivot as well and quickly, Gooding said. That included planting different varieties than they had planned to, sometimes at the last minute.

"People were trying to adjust at the last moment due to COVID," he said. "They adjusted things and that trickled back to us. It was just a real mess last spring. There were some tense moments last spring."

Gooding hopes things in the industry will start to return to some semblance of normal this spring, although he believes farmers will have to continue to adjust as the brewing industry does. He sees total hop acres, in Idaho and the U.S., remaining about the same.

"The acres will still be there; we just don't know what varieties they will be planted to," he said.

Idaho hop farmer Brock Obendorf said it's possible the industry hasn't seen the brunt of the COVID-related effects yet and he suspects it may take longer to return to normal. He believes total hop acres will be down in 2021.

"I don't know that we have really seen how bad the effects are yet," he said. "I think it's going to be two to three years out before it stabilizes."

Obendorf said it seems like morale in the industry is down somewhat with the latest round of COVID-related closures in some areas.

"We really need to get tap handles pouring beer again is what we need," he said.

Hop Growers of America Administrator Ann George said the significant yield reductions this year can be attributed largely to a major windstorm that hit Washington and much of the PNW on Labor Day weekend.

The high, sustained winds knocked



Idaho Farm Bureau Federation photo  
**Hops are processed in a facility in southwestern Idaho in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo. Hop production in Idaho increased for the ninth straight year, despite challenges posed by the COVID-related shutdowns and restrictions.**

down a lot of hop vines, she said, and that weather event was followed by smoke cover from major fires that blocked sunlight and fooled hop plants into thinking it was winter so they shut down, reducing yields.

"The big problem with yields was that Labor Day storm that hit during the peak of harvest and then the subsequent smoke cover," George said.

Because of the last-minute changes, Gooding said, some hop farmers ended up planting different varieties than they had planned to, resulting in more "baby" or first-year hop yards, which yield significantly less.

At least in Idaho, "The overall yield per acre was down mainly because there were a lot of babies," he said.

Problems with spider mites and powdery mildew near harvest time also helped knock yields in Idaho down somewhat, Obendorf said.

The COVID-related social distancing restrictions and sanitizing rules had a significant financial impact on the industry this year and increased production costs, George said.

In addition to providing personal protective equipment, farmers had to hire more people to do the monitoring and

sanitizing, she said.

And the social distancing requirements resulted in some farmers having to provide more housing because of the reduced number of people allowed in a dwelling. They also had to increase the number of buses they used for the same reason.

"There was a lot more administrative overhead because you had to implement those ongoing daily cleaning activities," George said. "It was a huge additional cost of doing business."

Hop acres and production, both in Idaho and the United States, have increased rapidly since 2012.

U.S. hop acreage has risen from 29,683 in 2012 to 58,641 in 2020, while in Idaho it has increased from 2,596 to 9,268 during that same period.

Idaho passed Oregon in 2016 to become the No. 2 state in the nation for hop production and the Gem State passed Oregon in 2017 in hop acreage as well.

Since 2015, the total value of Idaho hop production has increased from \$31 million to an estimated \$100 million this year. Hops ranked as Idaho's No. 9 farm commodity last year in terms of total farm-gate receipts. ■

# \$2 million gift to ag college will be ‘transformational’

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

A \$2 million gift to University of Idaho’s College of Agricultural and Life Sciences will be a big benefit to the state’s farming and ranching community, UI officials say.

CALS Dean Michael Parrella recently announced the gift from Northwest Farm Credit Services.

“It will do an enormous amount of good,” he said. “Any time there is a \$2 million gift, it is obviously transformational.”

In addition to the cutting-edge, ag-related research done by CALS researchers, the college also provides direct support to Idaho farmers and ranchers through its Extension offices in 42 of the state’s 44 counties.

UI’s ag college has been an excellent resource for Idaho producers, said Doug Robison, the Idaho president of Northwest Farm Credit Services, which is part of Farm Credit System, the largest provider of credit to American agriculture.

He told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation that NFCS’ board of directors and management team recognize the positive impact the university has on Idaho’s agricultural industry.

“The university’s essential research supports increasing production trends across nearly all of Idaho’s commodities,” Robison said. “The university provides excellent educational programs for producers of all sizes, from beginning farmers to the state’s largest agribusinesses.”

NFCS supports agriculture and rural communities by providing credit and financial services. The customer-owned financial cooperative provides billions of dollars in financing to farmers, ranchers, agribusinesses and rural home owners in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington and Alaska.

NFCS has a long history of supporting CALS financially, Parrella said, and the group’s contributions have helped boost the



Submitted photo  
**This is an artist's depiction of University of Idaho's Agriculture Biotechnology Lab, located on the university's Moscow campus. A \$2 million gift to the university's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences by Northwest Farm Credit Services will do an enormous amount of good for the state's farming and ranching community, said CALS Dean Michael Parrella.**

college’s research and problem-solving efforts conducted on behalf of the state’s farming and ranching communities.

“The investment in student opportunities helps provide agriculture with the engaged and educated workforce the industry will need to meet future challenges and sustain its role as Idaho’s economic foundation,” he said.

NFCS’ recent \$2 million gift includes \$925,000 to support the planned Agri Beef Meat Science and Innovation Center on UI’s Moscow campus that will serve as the new home for Vandal Brand Meats and conduct research and training that will benefit the state’s meat industry.

It also includes \$500,000 for CALS’ planned \$45 million Idaho Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment (CAFE), which will include the nation’s largest research dairy.

The gift also provides \$350,000 for the Wayne Thiessen Potato Research Professorship Endowment, which helps support efforts to improve potato storage technology, and \$175,000 for a planned \$7 million

renovation of CALS’ Parma Research and Extension Center.

The NFCS gift provides \$25,000 for student scholarships, as well as \$25,000 to establish a chapter of the national student organization, Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences.

“We are proud to work with the University of Idaho and look forward to seeing the positive impact this gift has on the university’s research and projects,” Robison said.

CALS has nine agricultural research and Extension centers located throughout the state where a wide variety of research is conducted that benefits the state’s agricultural industry.

Because agriculture is the most important sector of Idaho’s economy, according to UI studies, the \$2 million gift will benefit the state’s overall economy.

According to UI studies, agriculture directly and indirectly accounts for one in every eight jobs in the state and 13 percent of Idaho’s total gross state product. It is also responsible for 18 percent of total sales in Idaho. ■





Photo by Sean Ellis

Potatoes are harvested in a field near Aberdeen in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo. The Idaho potato brand benefits the entire state, not only spud farmers, Idaho Potato Commission CEO Frank Muir told lawmakers recently.

# The power of the Idaho potato brand

By Sean Ellis

*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

BOISE – In the end, 2020 was a pretty good year for Idaho’s iconic potato industry, but it sure wasn’t easy.

That’s one of the main messages Idaho Potato Commission CEO Frank Muir delivered to lawmakers recently as he brought members of the House and Senate agricultural committees up to date on how the state’s spud industry fared last year.

During his annual “state of the potato industry” address to Idaho legislators, Muir also spoke about the power of the Idaho potato

brand and how it helps not only the spud industry but the entire state.

“Whenever you say to anybody you’re from Idaho, then the next word that comes out of their mouth is, ‘potatoes,’” Muir said.

That connection between Idaho and potatoes should not be discounted, he added, because people associate Idaho potatoes with quality and by extension they also associate Idaho itself with quality.

“When consumers hear the words Idaho potatoes, the word that comes to mind is quality,” Muir said. “If Idaho potatoes means quality, Idaho implies quality as a brand. There are not too many states that can actually refer to their state as a brand. Idaho is one of those unique states.”

The Idaho potato industry through the IPC has spent hundreds of millions of dollars over the years promoting the Idaho potato brand and that has resulted in a benefit to spud growers as well as the state itself, Muir said.

“When you hear Idaho, it’s a strong opinion in consumers’ minds,” he said. “We believe that has created an economic benefit not only to potato growers in Idaho but to the whole state. I believe we’ve created an agriculture halo for beef, for dairy, for wine, for all sorts of (other) commodities and agricultural products in Idaho.”

Lawmakers agreed.

“It is a great brand,” said Sen. Doug Ricks, R-Rexburg, who grew up on a potato farm. “We appreciate our potato growers throughout the state for what they do.”

Sen. Van Burtenshaw, chairman of the Senate ag committee and a farmer and rancher from Terreton, concluded Muir’s presentation in the Senate by saying, “God bless the Idaho potato.”

Because the potato brand means so much to the state’s important spud industry, Muir said, the commission also aggressively defends it against improper uses.

In order to carry the “Grown in Idaho” seal, a bag of potatoes must have been grown in Idaho and the IPC continuously looks out for violations of that rule and challenges them, he said.

Because of the unique soil conditions in areas where spuds are grown here, DNA tests can even be used to determine if a potato was grown in Idaho, Muir said.

“The Idaho brand is so popular,” Sen. Jim Patrick, a Republican farmer from Twin Falls, told Muir “You do have a good brand and it takes a lot to protect it.”

Randy Hardy, a potato grower from Oakley, said Idaho is at a disadvantage to other potato-growing states because the state is so far from major population centers and the power of the Idaho power potato brand is the equalizer.

“I think the power of the Idaho potato brand is what separates us from everybody else,” he said.

“Idaho is a mystical place when it comes to potatoes. Let’s keep it that way,” Muir said.

Despite myriad challenges posed by the government-ordered shutdowns related to COVID-19, 2020 was a good year revenue-wise for Idaho’s potato farmers, Muir said.

Idaho potato growers brought in an estimated \$1.1 billion in farm-cash receipts last year, according to estimates by University of Idaho agricultural economists. If realized, that would be a record for potato revenue in Idaho.

That revenue will benefit much more than just potato growers, Muir said, because according to a study by U of I researchers, Idaho’s potato crop results in another \$4 billion in added value to the state from the various facilities that process spuds.

“You have \$5 billion every year coming into Idaho because of potatoes,” he said.

Hitting a record for potato revenue was no easy task last year because of the serious challenges posed by the COVID-related shutdowns, particularly in the foodservice industry, Muir told lawmakers.

About 60 percent of the spuds grown in Idaho end up in foodservice channels such as the restaurant industry, which ground to a halt because of the shutdowns.

At the same time, potato sales at the retail level exploded, but there was no easy way to shift all of the suddenly unneeded supply destined for foodservice channels to retail, Muir said.

The IPC worked with potato shippers and industry partners in the retail and foodservice industries to move a large amount of spuds to grocery stores, where consumers were scooping them up almost as fast as they arrived.

“This moved a lot of potatoes,” Muir said. At a minimum, he added, those efforts helped shift 40 million pounds of potatoes from foodservice channels to the retail market.

In the early part of 2020, potato growers were looking at record prices but then prices tanked when the COVID shutdowns hit, Hardy said. However, they rebounded in the latter part of 2020 and “it was actually a pretty good year,” he added.

But that doesn’t mean all is rosy in the potato industry right now, Hardy said.

While potato sales at the retail level are still up significantly compared to previous years, the restaurant industry is still feeling major impacts from the shutdowns and that is still posing a problem for the domestic potato industry, he said.

“The restaurant (demand) is deadlier than a doornail; right now it’s really slow,” Hardy said. “Retail’s still good but it’s not making up for what we’re not selling in foodservice.”

The quality of Idaho’s 2020 potato crop was excellent, Hardy said. “We have probably one of the higher quality crops Idaho has ever seen ... and the market’s not needing it right now,” he said. ■

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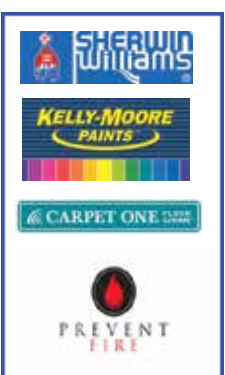
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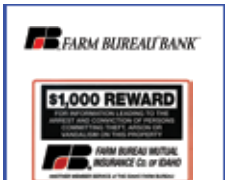
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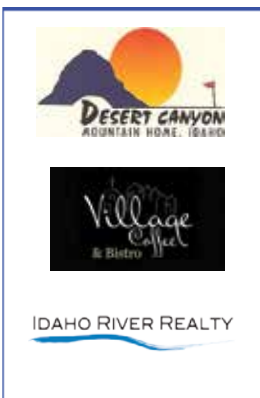
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Photo by Joseph Milan, Bureau of Land Management

Dalmatian toadflax was introduced because of its pretty flowers. Shown here is a biological control agent introduced for control of Dalmatian toadflax, a weevil named *Mecinus janthiniformis*.

# Consider biological control to help with invasive plant management

By **Timothy Prather**  
*University of Idaho*

Most plants introduced into North America do not cause problems for us in crop or forest lands. Some do become problems even though they are pretty to look at, which is a reason for their intentional introduction.

For example, the whole group of brooms were brought here because they have pretty flowers but they are causing challenges for us, particularly in northern Idaho forest lands.

All brooms are now considered noxious weeds, yet they still will continue to cause problems where they occur. So why do some plants move from pretty, ornamental plants to causing prob-

lems for us?

Our native plants have a whole series of organisms that limit the plant's ability to grow and compete with other plants. When a plant species is brought here, they are brought without the whole group of organisms that feed upon them, making the introduced plant species more competitive.

We call the phenomenon "Enemy Release" and most of the plant species that move from ornamental to weedy or invasive achieve that status, in large part, because of Enemy Release.

So how do we deal with plants that become weedy/invasive? There are numerous strategies, from detection surveys and early response for removal to mechanical or herbicidal control tac-





Photo by Joseph Milan, Bureau of Land Management  
**Dalmatian toadflax weed dominates a clearing.**

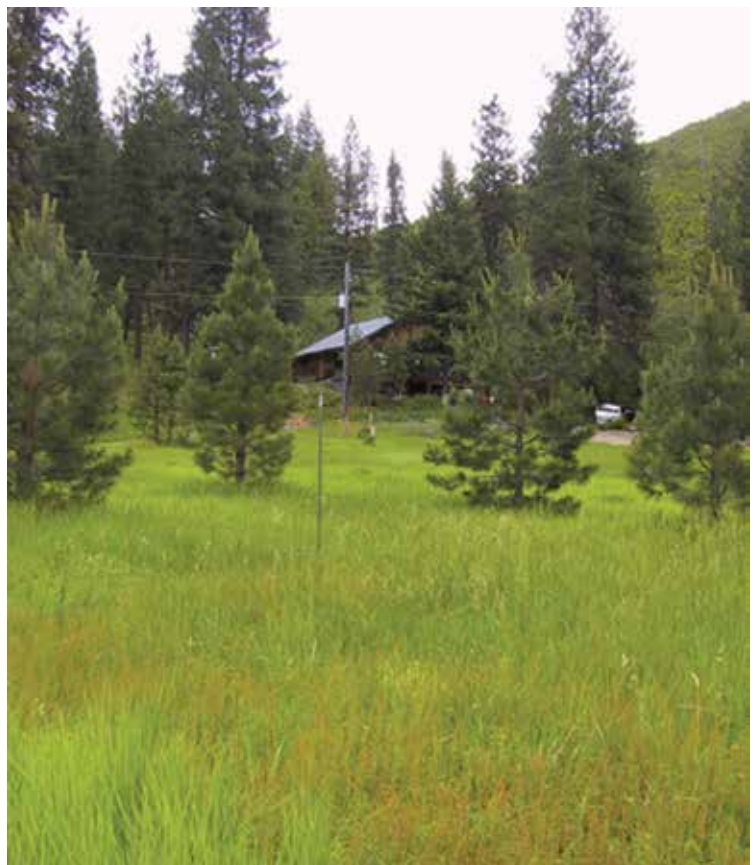


Photo by Joseph Milan, Bureau of Land Management  
**After introduction of a weevil called *Mecinus janthiniformis*, Dalmatian toadflax is still present but no longer dominates the area, around 10 years later.**

tics for those species that are found across large tracts of land.

Another strategy that can complement our other control strategies is called classical biological control. The idea here is to bring a subset of the organisms that had been reducing the plant's competitive ability in its native home to the plant's new home.

Once brought here, these organisms increase in population as the weed/invasive plant population increases. When biological control agents are well established, the hope is for a reduction in the plant population to lower levels that reduce the plant's impact on native vegetation that often includes plant species in forested lands.

So why do the biological control agent populations decline when the plant population declines? The organisms that are brought here have a small subset of plants that allow for completion of their life cycle.

Researchers who work on biological control agents have testing protocols that

tell us the risks of a particular biological control agent's potential to move to another plant host. If the agent goes to a crop plant, it is removed from consideration.

If the biological control agent chooses to go to another native plant that is related to the target plant, perhaps in the same genus, then it likely will also be removed from consideration.

These types of tests are called host specificity tests and are designed to assess the likelihood of a given potential biological control agent moving to another species. A potential biological control agent must receive federal approval through a process that considers a range of potential impacts and approval is difficult to achieve if the biological control agent develops on a native plant.

Biological control agents often are insects and include a range of different types of insects that include beetles like weevils or flea beetles, flies, moths and wasps. More information on agents and targeted

weeds can be found at <https://www.ibio-control.org/catalog/index.cfm>.

These biological control agents often attack a specific part of the plant. Some feed on flowers or developing seeds, others bore into stems and still others bore into roots.

When a target weed is perennial (long-lived), the best strategy may be to target stems or roots in addition to flowers. A focus just on flowers may reduce seed production but may not reduce the population to levels where the weed has minimal impact.

Biological control agents are not always insects. There are mites that have been released as biological control agents. For example, a mite was released for control of rush skeletonweed.

Other agents have included fungi such as rust fungi that are host-specific.

One example of a successful biological control program involves search and discovery of a biological control agent for the

See **PLANT**, page 28





Photo by Sean Ellis

Sen. Doug Ricks, R-Rexburg, congratulates Rexburg farmer Marquee Ricks March 12 for winning the American Farm Bureau Federation Discussion Meet in January. The senator, who is not related to Marquee Ricks but represents her legislative district, sponsored an Idaho Senate proclamation that recognizes Ricks' AFBF victory. Marquee Ricks is shown in this photo along with her husband, Brett, and Melissa Durrant, chairwoman of Idaho Farm Bureau Federation's Young Farmers and Ranchers program.

# Legislature recognizes Idaho farmer for national victory

By Sean Ellis

*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

BOISE – The Idaho Legislature is recognizing an Idaho farmer for winning a national speaking event designed to improve the public speaking skills of young farmers and ranchers.

Senate Proclamation 101 recognizes Marquee Ricks for winning the American Farm Bureau Federation Discussion Meet Jan. 13.

The proclamation passed the Senate March 12 by a unanimous voice vote and is currently moving through the House.

Ricks, who farms with her husband, Brett, near Rexburg, won the Idaho Farm Bureau

Federation Discussion Meet in December and competed in the AFBF Discussion Meet against 29 other state winners.

The Discussion Meet, which is part of Farm Bureau's Young Farmers and Ranchers Program, is meant to simulate a committee meeting rather than a debate. It is meant to

See RICKS, page 28

# Farming green:

## Parma hops farmers using 100% renewable energy through Idaho Power program

By John O'Connell

*Intermountain Farm and Ranch*

Brock and Phil Obendorf can now add a sizable investment in “peace of mind” to the list of inputs when they tally production costs for their Parma hops farm.

Since 2020, the brothers have rightfully claimed that their business uses 100% clean, renewable energy, having committed to purchase 3,000 megawatt hours of Idaho Power energy efficiency credits per year.

The credits are sold to businesses and individuals interested in demonstrating their commitment to environmental stewardship. They're tied to Idaho Power's investments in clean energy, such as solar and wind power and hydro-power production efficiency upgrades.

Idaho Power estimates the Obendorf's credits represent a benefit equal to planting 34,000 trees.

“In the future I think you're going to have to figure out how to be sustainable in all aspects of farming ... We as a company think it's very important,” Brock Obendorf said.

Idaho Power launched its Large Renewable Energy Purchase Option program in 2017 but didn't get its first takers until last year.

The three current large business participants are the Obendorf's, the Boise Co-op and Bogus Basin ski area. The minimum credit purchase to participate covers 750 megawatt hours per year.

Idaho Power has also offered a program for residential and small business customers since 2016, called Green Power. That program boasts 3,415 participants, including more than 80 small businesses, who also pay for the knowledge that the credits they buy are supporting green energy.

Some of the revenue supports an educational program teaching school children about renewable energy, called Solar for our Schools.



Parma hops farmer Phil Obendorf and his family discuss their clean energy purchases within their hops farm in a new Idaho Power video.

Idaho Power spokesman Sven Berg explained participants seeking to make a 100% renewable energy claim can immediately count about half of their consumption as renewable because the company's energy portfolio is about half renewable hydro-power. Credits can make up the difference.

“Obendorf Farms' commitment to clean energy aligns with its history of reducing its environmental impact through measures like cover crops to stabilize the soil and energy efficiency upgrades to its current system,” Berg said. “It also aligns with Idaho Power's own goal of providing 100% clean energy by 2045 without compromising their tradition of reliability and affordability.”

Berg produced a video available at [youtube.com/idahopower](https://www.youtube.com/idahopower) featuring the Obendorfs. They've raised hops in Canyon County for more than 70 years, and their hops are used to make 3% percent of the world's beer, according to the video.

They raise 15 hop varieties on 3,500 acres, and their farm consumes more electricity than 400 typical Idaho Power homes.

Brock Obendorf said participating in the

program also “makes us look good on our selling side” as food and beverage manufacturers increasingly look to assure consumers that they're sourcing sustainable ingredients. Sustainability is becoming a greater focus of farming audits, such as GLOBALG.A.P.

Brock Obendorf said participation in the Idaho Power program is just one of many ways his farm has sought to be a good environmental steward.

The farm waters with an efficient drip irrigation system, and their pumps use variable-frequency drives. They haul hops with 70 clean-burning propane trucks. They feed hop tailings to cattle.

Within the next five years, they plan to add solar panels to rooftops of some of their buildings.

Phil Obendorf considers his participation in the program to be an investment in his son's future.

“Mason, he is the first of the fifth generation for the next generation to take over and our goal is to leave a sustainable operation for him so he can carry it on,” Phil Obendorf said. ■



# PLANT

*Continued from page 25*

weed, Dalmatian toadflax. A weevil was screened to determine if it would attack crops or native plant species related to Dalmatian toadflax.

Risk was determined to be low and the weevil, *Mecinus janthiniformis*, was released.

When a site is also occupied by competitive plants, the Dalmatian toadflax is not as competitive and does not dominate the site. Long-term control can be achieved when conditions are right.

Biological control programs like the one for Dalmatian toadflax take many years of searching and study before an agent might be released. Once introduced, the biological control agent will take years to increase in population and then people involved with biological control work together to distribute

the biological control agents throughout the state.

Partnerships between University of Idaho's Dr. Mark Schwarzlander, Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, Nez Perce Biocontrol Center and many others work to distribute biological control agents throughout the state.

Dalmatian toadflax is just one example of an extensive list of biological control programs for many weedy/invasive plants. Some new programs with biological control agents released include one for Japanese and Bohemian knotweed with the approval of a psyllid, *Aphalaría itadori*. Others that show promise include assessing the application for release of a biological control agent for houndstongue.

Invasive and weedy plant species continue to impact our forested lands and we certainly

value all the tools we have to help in their control.

Biological weed control can have a long-term sustained control of a species that previously was a significant problem. Local areas may still experience escape from biological control and using other strategies like mechanical control or herbicides can help meet local goals for control.

After an outbreak of the weedy/invasive plant, biological control agents may move from surrounding areas or be actively reintroduced by the owner or manager of the land.

Be sure to consider how you might integrate biological control into management of your own forest lands.

*Timothy Prather is a professor of invasive plant biology at the University of Idaho. He can be contacted at [tprather@uidaho.edu](mailto:tprather@uidaho.edu) ■*

# RICKS

*Continued from page 26*

hone the public speaking and problem-solving skills of young farmers and ranchers between the ages of 18 and 35.

When presented with a challenge in the form of a question, participants direct their discussions toward each other in an attempt to arrive at a solution.

Young farmers and ranchers across the nation compete in various Discussion Meets during the year and the state-level winners of these events compete against each other during AFBF's annual convention.

The winners of Discussion Meet events are not necessarily the ones who are the most dominating or smart but rather the ones who fostered good discussion and ideas among all the contestants.

Ricks traveled to Boise for the Senate vote on the proclamation honoring her victory and, accompanied by her husband as well as other IFBF members, met with Gov. Brad Little before the vote.

Immediately after winning the AFBF competition, Ricks told IFBF staff that her greatest feeling of accomplishment was winning the event for Idaho.

On March 12, Little told Ricks, "Idaho is

very proud of you. That's a big honor."

Ricks said she received a lot of help researching some of the discussion topics and she said those people who helped her should also receive some of the credit for her AFBF victory.

"I definitely wouldn't be here without the dozens of people who helped me," she said following the Senate vote. "I had a lot of support."

Ricks said making it through the various rounds of the IFBF and AFBF events was tough and she had to do a lot of homework. But she also said she believes anyone who puts their mind to it can perform well in a Discussion Meet event.

Ricks is from Alaska and did not get involved in agriculture until moving to

*"I definitely wouldn't be here without the dozens of people who helped me. I had a lot of support."*

— Marquee Ricks, Rexburg farmer

Idaho in 2009 and marrying a farmer.

"I feel if I can do it, anyone can do it ... because I didn't grow up in agriculture," she said. "I grew up knowing very, very little about agriculture."

Like many other Idaho Farm Bureau Federation members, IFBF President Bryan Searle, a farmer from Shelley, followed Ricks virtually during the rounds of the AFBF competition.

"She did phenomenal," Searle said. "She represented Idaho and Idaho Farm Bureau well."

The proclamation recognizes Ricks for winning the IFBF and AFBF Discussion Meet events "and for the pride she brings to the young farmers and ranchers of Idaho and the United States." ■

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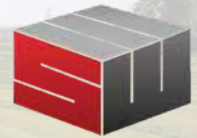


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Visit: [idahofarmbureauinsurance.com/refer-a-friend-get-a-gift](http://idahofarmbureauinsurance.com/refer-a-friend-get-a-gift) for complete rules and restrictions. Above left: Summer Morgan, the winner of our fourth quarter Refer A Friend, Get A Gift \$500 drawing, with agent Trudy Crawford.





Photo by Lisa Jensen

Hay in Gem County is taken down to be sold to a customer. The county is experiencing rapid growth, which is impacting farmland prices and availability.

# Rapid growth impacting Gem County farmland

By Sean Ellis

*Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

EMMETT – Gem County used to be the fruit capital of Idaho, with hundreds of fruit orchards located all around Emmett,

the county seat.

The Emmett Cherry Festival is still celebrated each year but in reality, the county's days of bumper fruit crops are long gone.

“We had a lot of fruit grown here,” says Vaughn Jensen, who farms around Emmett

and earned money as a youth picking cherries. “But there’s not much left in the way of cherries or other fruit orchards.”

“Where we’re standing, this all used to be cherries, all the way around for ... miles,” Clint Rohrbacher, president of Gem



County Farm Bureau, says while standing near one of his family's farm fields on the east side of town. "Growing cherries is more of a hobby for people now. There's not a lot of fruit left in Emmett anymore."

Beef cattle is now the county's No. 1 agricultural commodity in terms of farm-cash receipts, according to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, which shows that in 2017 there were more than 23,000 cattle and calves in Gem County, which is also home to Idaho Gov. Brad Little, a cattle rancher.

The county also has more than 5,700 sheep and lambs.

The top crops in Gem County are corn for grain and silage, hay, wheat and sugar beets.

But as happened with the fruit orchards during another period, farmland around Emmett, the county's only city, is disappearing quickly.

Emmett is a short drive away from Boise, Meridian and Nampa, which is one of the fastest-growing areas in the country on a percentage basis. The explosive growth that has occurred in those cities has now come to Emmett and that has resulted in farmland being gobbled up at a rapid pace.

"People are coming in and buying up our farm ground for three times what we can pay for it, or more, and putting houses on all of it," Rohrbacher says. "So it's quite a challenge for all of us to keep enough ground to farm on."

He says the development has accelerated the past two years.

"It's never been as bad as it is right now," Rohrbacher says. "They're right on our doorstep now."

He says the last time he met with planning and zoning officials, they had more than 50 minor subdivision applications turned in.

"It's not fun to see but I don't



Photo by Lisa Jensen  
Corn is delivered March 24 in Gem County. Corn is one of the main crops grown in the county, which is experiencing rapid growth.





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blame people for selling their land when they can get five times what it's worth out of it," Rohrbacher says. "How do you stop it when people show up offering so much money?"

That rapid growth makes it difficult for young people to get into farming, says Emmett farmer Tracy Walton.

"It's pretty tough for any young farmers to get started because the price of land has gone up so much," he said.

But besides chewing up farmland, that rapid development also has agricultural producers around Emmett concerned about the impact it will have on property taxes.

"What we worry about is the funding of new schools and what (the growth) is going to do to our taxes," Jensen says. "We're supportive of schools but it's still a concern. That's the concern with the growth that is coming: Will we be able to afford it?"

Gem County Farm Bureau members, including Rohrbacher, Jensen and Walton, are trying to address the issue by making sure they have good working relationships with the county commissioners, schools officials, planning and zoning folks, the sheriff's office, road and bridge officials and others.

By meeting with these officials regularly, farmers and ranchers can ensure they have a say in important issues such as zoning and funding for schools and other government entities, Rohrbacher says.

"We just have to stay involved with every avenue we can," he says. "You don't want the growth just blowing up everywhere."

Zoning regulations in particular are one way to try to ensure the growth that occurs happens in a smart way but the issue is a sticky one, Jensen says.

"Zoning, that's a tough issue," he says. "Nobody should be able to tell you that you can't split off an acre and sell it to developers, but on the other hand, you can see the wisdom of that. I don't like zoning but I do like zoning."

Besides trying to keep some kind of handle on the rapid growth, Gem County Farm Bureau members also focus heavily on trying to educate people in the county about where their food comes from.

"There are a lot of people that don't know where their milk comes from, even in Emmett," Rohrbacher says. "Education is a big part of what we try to do. That's definitely something important we have to continue to keep up on."

The county Farm Bureau also provides scholarships and sponsors a lot of FFA and 4-H activities and programs.

According to the Census of Agriculture, there were 860 farms in Gem County in 2017 and 666 of them were less than 50 acres in size. Fifty farms in the county were from 180-499 acres in size, 17 were between 500 and 999 acres and 29 were at least 1,000 acres.

The county had 12,482 acres of forage crops, 3,931 acres of corn for grain, 1,802 acres of corn for silage, 1,665 acres of wheat and 598 acres of sugar beets.

More than 98 percent of all the farms in the county are family owned. ■

## Be prepared for market fluctuations

This past year we have experienced much uncertainty, along with very good prices for our commodities. We have seen good exports for wheat and corn, along with good demand here in the domestic market.

However, there have been times in the domestic market when demand has been rather thin for southeast Idaho producers.

The flour mills set the tone for the market in the southern and southeastern parts of the state and they filled their needs early and have been on the sidelines for the past few months. The new crop bids into this market have been good and we have seen producers taking advantage of this opportunity to contract wheat into the third and fourth quarters.

Hedge-to-arrive contracts have been popular and are good contracts to enter into; however, since you are waiting for the basis to strengthen, you should contract for the OND time frame rather than August/September. It is usually difficult for the basis to strengthen during harvest.

Recently, the question on producers' minds is whether or not we think December corn futures will reach the five dollar mark. We keep reducing the amount of corn in the world with exports still cruising along just fine.

We have yet to plant the crop and it is a long time until we harvest that



crop. So, the answer is, yes, we could very well reach \$5 December futures, especially given the volatility we see each spring as we experience conditions that are too wet, too dry, too cold and too hot.

When we look at the historical trend in the corn mar-

ket, we see that we stay volatile trending higher until we see that the corn will pollinate in good shape. Once we reach this time frame, then we do have a tendency to trend lower through harvest.

I realize that this year could be different. But, let's not forget the estimates of 93 million acres of corn being planted this year.

Could a 15-plus billion bushel crop of corn put a damper on the upside to the market? We really won't know until after the fact.

Whatever you do in your marketing, keep emotion out of the plan and don't get caught up in thinking the market has nowhere to go but up.

Remember, we are managing our price risk in the market. Contract a little here and a little there and you will be alright. Hitting a string of singles is still a very good average.

In the cattle market, the March World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates report lowered overall meat production but it did increase beef production slightly. The October feeder cattle futures are currently

trading at or near the high for the past few years.

These are levels that could help producers be profitable this year. A program that includes hedging with futures is a good fit for most producers.

Learn all you can on how this works and then you will be able to make your decision on whether or not it will benefit you in your operation. Not managing your risk in some manner is in reality the biggest risk of all.

Let's face it, all the markets have changed from what we remember. Just the volatility that we now experience can be mind boggling at times.

How can we out-guess the market? The answer is, we can't. For example, the news flows into Chicago and the markets trade that news at the same time the news is flowing out to us.

I will stick my neck out and say that we will never have the market-moving news before the market receives it. Knowing this, we should always look at our price risk and ask ourselves, "How do I manage this risk?"

We now have a variety of risk management tools available to us. Learning just how these tools can help us may take some time to study and learn but just like anything else in your operation, it is vital that you do it.

Learning how to do this may not be as exciting as other aspects of your operation and may at time be a little painful but over time you will become comfortable and may even get to where you like it.

*Clark Johnston is a grain marketing specialist and owner of JC Management Co. of Ogden, Utah. He can be reached at [clark@jcmanagement.net](mailto:clark@jcmanagement.net). ■*





Submitted photo

**A Midwest-based company recently licensed a new, herbicide-resistant winter canola variety developed by retired University of Idaho plant breeder Jack Brown and colleagues as a new crop option for wheat growers.**

# New canola variety a new crop option for wheat farmers

## University of Idaho news release

MOSCOW — A Midwest-based company recently licensed a new, herbicide-resistant winter canola variety developed by retired University of Idaho plant breeder Jack Brown and colleagues as a new crop option for wheat growers.

The University of Idaho Office of Technology Transfer registered the new Chinook winter canola as a federal Plant Protected Variety in 2020 and trademarked G2Flex, the herbicide-resistance technology included in the new variety.

Seed distributor WinField United obtained an exclusive license to market Chinook seed to farmers. The new variety will be marketed by WinField as CROPLAN CP1022WC,

“This high-yielding, extremely winter hardy variety from the University of Idaho’s breeding program looks to gain a lot of

market share in 2021,” said Mick Miller, WinField’s winter canola product manager in Montana. “The growth potential for acres in the north allows great placement of CP1022WC in Montana, North Dakota, Washington, Idaho and Oregon.”

Wheat growers increasingly use wheat varieties resistant to herbicides that can control grassy weeds that reduce crop yields. Those same Group 2 herbicides limited the use of canola in crop rotations because residual herbicides in the soil damaged its growth.

The new variety incorporates a genetic trait with resistance to multiple Group 2 herbicides most commonly used with the new wheat varieties.

Like the new wheats, Chinook winter canola uses an herbicide-resistance trait developed through conventional plant breeding methods and does not rely on genetic engineering and so is not considered a genetically

modified organism, Brown said.

The new variety becomes the first winter canola available to farmers with the herbicide-resistance trait, said Brown, who led the U of I College of Agricultural and Life Sciences oilseed breeding program for more than two decades before retiring in 2020.

Other winter canola varieties on the market with herbicide resistance are considered GMOs, Brown said. That means Chinook, which offers excellent oil qualities, appeals to an important market niche, he added.

“The U of I Chinook oilseed variety will open new doors for wheat farmers needing an herbicide-resistant canola in their crop rotation, since it incorporates G2Flex™ technology,” said Jeremy Tamsen, director of U of I’s Office of Technology Transfer. “Without the license agreement, Winfield customers would be unable to purchase this new variety through commercial seed retailers.” ■

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# Researcher developing potato with greening resistance

By John O'Connell

*Intermountain Farm and Ranch*

The potato breeder with the USDA's Agricultural Research Service in Aberdeen is using genetics from a wild spud relative to develop crosses that won't turn green when exposed to light.

Richard Novy, a potato breeder with the agency's Small Grains and Potato Germplasm Research Facility, plans to plant the first field generation of crosses developed to resist tuber greening this spring.

Novy said potatoes with the trait can also be exposed to light without accumulating compounds that confer a bitter taste, known as glycoalkaloids.

Greening is a perennial quality challenge for growers, mostly attributable to shallow-growing tubers that breach the soil in the field.

"I've heard from processors in Asia. They're very aware of greening and it can cause issues with exports to other markets," Novy said, offering an example of the consequences of greening.

Novy introduced the trait into his program by crossing the wild species *Solanum microdontum* with a modern Russet, thereby making it easier to make future crosses.

He learned about the trait when he read a scientific journal paper by John Bamberg, project leader with the U.S. Potato Genebank in Wisconsin. One of Bamberg's staff members had noticed some wild tubers exposed to light weren't turning green.

Introducing traits from wild relatives of modern potatoes is often extremely difficult. Most wild types are diploids, meaning they have 24 chromosomes. Modern commercial potatoes are tetraploids, with 48 chromosomes.

To make his cross, Novy used a technique known as unreduced gametes.

He explained that a very small percent-



Photo by John O'Connell

**Rich Novy, a potato breeder, plans to plant his first field generation this season of spuds that resist tuber greening. He is shown here in his program's experimental fields in Aberdeen.**

age of *microdontum* plants gave rise to "unreduced" eggs — passing along two identical sets of 12 chromosomes rather than the expected single set of chromosomes — and could therefore be fertilized by pollen from a commercial tetraploid variety that passed along the usual haploid set of 24 chromosomes.

Though he's overcome the breeding bottleneck, Novy said it will still be about a decade before the first greening-resistant clones pass through the requisite field evaluations and can be released as varieties.

Novy hopes to soon publish about his greening-resistant breeding clone in a scientific journal. He's already received

requests for the clone from other breeding programs, including in Colorado and North Carolina.

Fresh potato grower Derek Reed, of Idaho Falls, estimates between 6% and 8% of his spuds are affected by tuber greening in most seasons.

"It's certainly an issue I'm concerned about," Reed said. "We work hard to get our hills set up right and get the spuds at the right depth so they don't do that."

Reed typically plants Russet Burbank, which was developed in the early 1900s, rather than newer varieties. Nonetheless, he considers the introduction of the greening trait to be an interesting and important development. ■



# Bovine pedicures

Hoof trimming  
keeps cows happy  
and productive

By Dianna Troyer

*For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation*

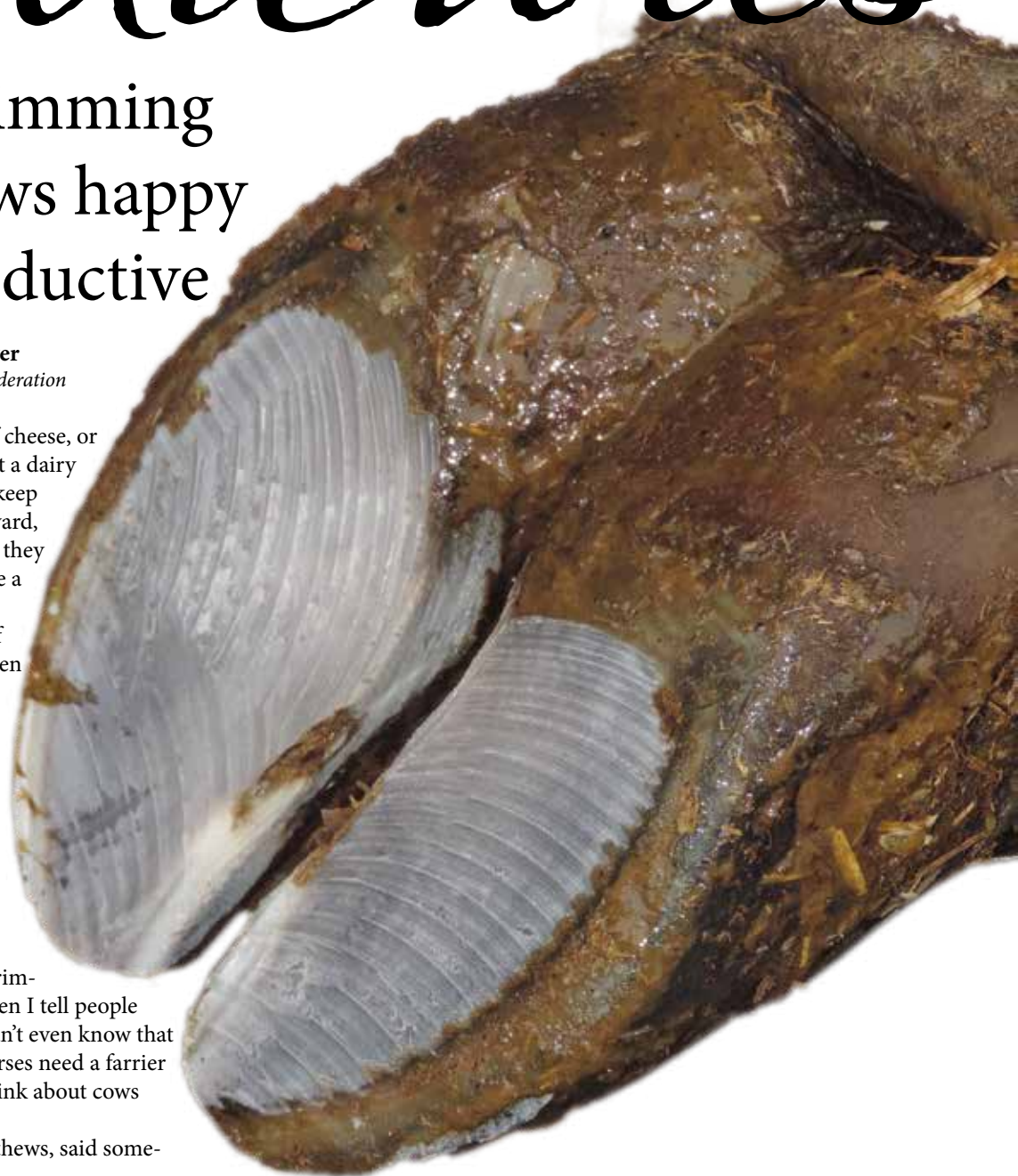
Behind a glass of milk, slice of cheese, or bowl of ice cream is a dirty job at a dairy that few people know exists. To keep cows putting their best foot forward, healthy, and at peak production, they need their hooves trimmed twice a year.

Drew Peterson, 28, a cow hoof trimmer based in Rupert, has been giving bovine pedicures for five years. While guiding an electric grinder to level a cow's hooves, shavings fly through the air and ping off his protective plastic facial shield.

It's understandable why cow hoof trimming was featured on the television show, "Dirty Jobs with Mike Rowe."

"It was funny to watch Mike trimming a cow," Peterson said. "When I tell people what I do, they usually say, 'I didn't even know that was a job.' Most people know horses need a farrier to trim their hooves but don't think about cows needing it, too."

Peterson's assistant, Ryan Matthews, said some-



times people laugh when he tells them his occupation. “I get a look like, ‘What’s that? You give cows a pedicure? Why?’”

Cow hoof trimmers get the last laugh with permanent job security. Peterson and Matthews are in high demand five to six days a week at dairies throughout southeastern Idaho. Dairy owners understand the importance of their job.

“Cows need their hooves trimmed at least twice a year,” Peterson said, estimating hooves grow about two inches annually. “If their feet hurt, their milk production drops because they don’t feel like eating or drinking.”

Peterson keeps cows’ hooves level so their weight is evenly distributed and they are comfortable.

“At dairies, the cows aren’t on pasture, so their hooves aren’t naturally worn down,” he said. “The hooves tend to grow long at the toe and stay short at the heel. We keep them balanced and sound.”

Peterson began trimming hooves in 2016 when he bought the business from a friend who moved to New York to work at a dairy.

“He wanted his clients to still have a hoof trimmer,” Peterson said. “I did an internship with him to see if I’d like the job and did. I’ve always liked working outside.”

Peterson estimates there are about a half dozen cow hoof trimmers throughout southeastern Idaho. They stay busy and are essential to the state’s dairy industry.

Hoof trimmers like Peterson help keep Idaho’s 600,000 cows at 450 dairies at peak productivity. Idaho’s cows produce more than 40 million pounds of milk per day or 15 billion pounds per year, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Peterson points out how the dairy industry is a crucial cog of Idaho’s economy.

Dairy is Idaho’s most valuable farm commodity in terms of farm cash receipts – the money that farmers receive from buyers of their commodity. Idaho’s milk receipts totaled \$2.85 billion for 2019, the most recent year statistics were compiled, according to the USDA’s Economic Research Service.

Peterson and Matthews work quickly as a team, trimming about 80 to 100 cows a day. Matthews guides each cow into a secure chute atop a hydraulic table. With



Photos by Dianna Troyer  
**Drew Peterson says his bovine pedicures help keep cows sound and at peak production at dairies throughout southeastern Idaho. OPPOSITE PAGE: Hooves are leveled so a cow’s weight is evenly distributed and she is comfortable.**

the cow strapped in place, the table rises to waist-level, so Peterson can stand and work comfortably.

Using straps, Matthews secures and lifts one leg at a time. Peterson follows him, grinding each hoof. In about five minutes, a cow’s hooves are trimmed.

“If she has an infection or lameness issue, it takes a little longer,” Peterson said.

To take care of an occasional abscess or wart, Peterson cuts away the damaged

hoof, applies disinfectant, and wraps it.

“We do our best to avoid lameness at the farms we service,” Peterson said. “In order to do that we need to work alongside farmers, nutritionists, and veterinarians to keep the cows as healthy as possible.

“It’s definitely a dirty job, but it’s satisfying because you have a sense of accomplishment at the end of the day. The dairy owners are really appreciative and treat us well, too.” ■



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PAGES 20 & 21

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