

Idaho Farm Bureau. Quarterly

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96% of farms are FAMILY owned



**Following
a sheep
rancher, 12**

**Idaho No. 2
in irrigation
withdrawals, 18**

**'Farming'
worms, 38**

Continuing the steady march forward



When I was a young man first starting out in dairying, I never imagined how much agriculture would change and the technology I'd have available at my fingertips.

With the help of innovation, farmers and ranchers have risen to the challenge of providing a growing population with food, fuel and fiber—without using more land and resources. In fact, we would have needed nearly 100 million more acres 30 years ago to match today's production levels.

In the past few decades, farmers and ranchers have built new automated livestock facilities,

planted more drought-resistant crops, and adopted innovative climate-smart farming practices.

New machinery allows us to do more with less, and precision ag technologies help us apply less pesticides, fertilizer and water. We only use exactly what we need, exactly where it's needed.

These and many other technologies were made possible through public investments in agriculture research. A recent study found that U.S. public agricultural research and development spending from 1910 to 2007 returned \$17 for every \$1 invested.

See **DUVALL**, page 6

The President's Desk

By Bryan Searle

President Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Trying to bridge the rural-urban divide



The divide between rural and urban America continues to widen and that is worrisome for several reasons, including the fact that, in the end, we are all Americans and need to live and play nice with each other.

This divide can be seen by looking at a national map showing which counties voted "red" or "blue" during the last two presidential elections. With few exceptions, urban counties with large population centers voted blue and rural counties voted red.

The map is simple but startling and shows a huge gap between how people in urban and rural areas

think politically. But the urban-rural divide is more than just political; it is also economic and cultural.

Increasingly, it appears the two sides are growing more distant from each other, economically, culturally and politically, and that's unfortunate because any nation is strongest when its citizens are united.

It behooves people in rural and urban areas to remember that they need each other.

We all have to eat and our nation's food supply comes largely from rural areas. We all need access to electronic devices, vehicles and other necessities

See **SEARLE**, page 7

Inside Farm Bureau

By Zak Miller

CEO Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Using Idaho's sun, water and nutrients to grow plants



To grow a plant requires only three key components: sun, water, and nutrients. Idaho has plenty of all three, but successfully using them together to produce an abundant supply of plants doesn't happen by accident.

Springtime brings excitement and optimism as so many people try to combine sun, water, and soil (nutrients) to grow something, whether it be a pot on a porch or thousands of acres of crops.

As simple as it may be to attempt to grow a plant, the truth is that it's far from simple. Fortunately, Idaho has people who have learned how to

grow plants using our existing natural resources. Doing that requires some ingenuity; it's not something that happens "naturally."

Let me provide some examples.

Sunlight and its growing heat come to us free of charge. A common term for this free energy from the sun is Growing Degree Units (GDU).

GDUs are a measure of heat accumulation used by horticulturists, gardeners, and farmers to predict plant and animal development rates, such as the date that a flower will bloom, an insect will emerge from

See **MILLER**, page 6

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COVER: Members of the Call family are shown in front of a tractor on the family farm west of American Falls April 7. According to a recent report by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service, 96 percent of the nation's two million farms are family owned and operated. See story on page 4.
 (Photo by Joel Benson)

Table of contents

- 3** Idaho ag export value rose 3 percent in 2020
- 4** 96 percent of farms are family owned
- 8** Letter raises alarm over trade
- 10** Parma research center upgrade is a go
- 12** Sheep rancher survives weird COVID year
- 18** Idaho ranks No. 2 in irrigation withdrawals
- 22** Agricultural Profile: Cassia County
- 24** Intermodal facility could benefit Idaho ag
- 26** Country Chuckles
- 28** Word Search: Springtime
- 32** 'Habitat' piles can benefit wildlife
- 35** Word Search Answers
- 36** Classifieds
- 37** Aquifer recharge paying dividends
- 38** Farming worms in downtown Boise

Idaho ag export value rose 3 percent in 2020

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO — Despite the myriad logistical challenges posed by COVID-19, Idaho's agricultural industry is still finding ways to export the farm products it produces to other countries.

The total value of Idaho farm product exports increased 3 percent last year compared with 2019, according to recently released U.S. Census Bureau data.

According to the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, which calculates the data, Idaho businesses sold \$927 million worth of agricultural products to other nations in 2020, up from \$899 million in 2019.

See **EXPORTS**, page 29



Family affair

96 percent of farms are family owned

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO — Recently released federal data lays waste to the myth that a large percentage of farms and ranches in the United States are “factory farms.”

According to report released Jan. 22 by USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service, 96 percent of the two million farms in the U.S. are family owned and operated. Ninety-six percent of the 25,000 farms in Idaho are also family owned.

That data was gathered from the 2017 Census of Agriculture.

The report shows what farmers and ranchers already know but much of the general populace does not, said Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President Bryan Searle, who farms in Shelley in south-east Idaho.

“Family-owned farms account for the vast majority of agricultural production in this nation and in Idaho,” he said. “For consumers, that means most of the food products they buy were produced by families just like theirs.”

According to the NASS report, family farms make up 96 percent of all U.S. farms and account for 87 percent of the land in farms and 82 percent of the value of all agricultural products sold.

Kelley Call, who farms with her husband, Evan, and their family near American Falls, said a lot of people mistakenly think all farms are big corporate operations.

“I wish they knew that it is really families behind these farms and they are family-run,” she said. “If they knew that, I believe they would be more willing to support us because it really is our family bringing food to their table.”

The Calls, along with their children and grandchildren, farm in the Coldwater area west of American Falls along with two of Evan’s brothers and their families.

It’s a true family affair.

“We farm potatoes, sugar beets, wheat and children, but not in that order; the children come first,” Evan Call said. “It’s a very family-oriented operation. When it comes time for planting or harvesting, we’re all involved. We all climb in different trucks



Ninety-six percent of the nation's two million farms are family owned and operated, according to a recent report by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service.

and tractors, all the wives and kids. We're all involved in it."

Evan Call said there have been a couple of times over the years when the family didn't know whether the farm would survive but they stuck with it and he wouldn't trade his career for anything.

"There is just something about going and working in the dirt with your son or your brother," he said. "I get to be with my best friend – my wife – and with my sons while I work. I get to run my hands through the dirt and I get to share that with my family and grandchildren."

Kelley Call drives the oldest truck on the farm, despite being offered a newer one, because it's the only one with a large sleeper bed that allows her to have all her grandchildren with her.

"What other job could I go to and have all my grandchildren with me?" she said

That family-oriented outlook on farming is not unique to the Calls.

"All over the country, families work side by side every day to produce one of the most abundant, affordable and safe food supplies in history," Searle said. "It's hard work and oftentimes financially risky but the farmers and ranchers I know wouldn't trade it for anything. What better job could you imagine having than being able to work together with your family, every day of the year?"

"Genesee" Joe Anderson, who farms with his family in North Idaho, said most people in rural areas probably know that the vast



Photos by Sean Ellis

Members of the Call family are shown in front of a tractor on the family farm west of American Falls April 7. According to a recent report by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service, 96 percent of the nation's two million farms are family owned and operated. OPPOSITE PAGE: Calvin Call and his son, Clay, exit a tractor April 7 on the Call family farm west of American Falls.

majority of farms are family owned and operated, but he doubts many people in urban areas understand that.

"In a small community like Genesee, I'm sure most people know that," he said. "But once you get into an urban area, I think most people don't know that. A lot of them think (big agribusinesses) own all the

farms. They think corporate ag is taking over everything."

Former Idaho rancher Chris Dalley, who now owns a ranch in Arizona, said a lot of city folks see big farm equipment from the road and probably assume most farms are big corporate operations.

See **FAMILY**, page 9

DUVALL

Continued from page 2

I can't think of many investments that bring those kind of returns today!

Unfortunately, the U.S. is now trailing behind other countries, like China, when it comes to these critical investments.

The American Farm Bureau, in partnership with the Farm Journal Foundation, recently commissioned a report detailing how public research funding has remained flat for the past decade while our competitors have increased their funding for public ag research.

While there have been significant private investments in research funding, these funds are targeted to high-value products in the most popular commodities, leaving a considerable gap that public research must fill.

In just 30 years, the world's population will reach 10 billion, and we will have to increase food production (significantly) to feed everyone. With more urban and suburban expansion, we will likely have less farmland available to meet this growing challenge.

Farmers and ranchers are counting on scientists and researchers to help us protect the food supply and meet our sustainability goals, just as we have adapted and grown for generations now.

We also must develop new tools to help our food supply chains quickly adapt in a crisis. At the onset of the pandemic, many Americans found empty store shelves and mile-long lines at local food banks.

MILLER

Continued from page 2

dormancy, or a crop will reach maturity.

While the sun may shine on all of us, all the heat is not equal.

In Idaho, Caldwell received 3,913 GDUs in 2020, while Salmon received only 1,242. Such differences in GDUs require farmers or gardeners in each area to thoughtfully choose what to grow and when to plant.

While GDUs help indicate how much growth potential a site may have, they also provide an insight into the severity of drought an area may experience without water.

For example, Twin Falls, with 3,743 GDUs in 2020, receives the heat. However, that city only gets 9.33 inches of precipitation annually, which requires irrigation to keep plants from turning brown quite quickly.

New Meadows, with 1,720 GDUs, may not grow prize-winning cantaloupes. However, the 23.25 inches of precipitation and 86.2 inches of snow it gets annually will keep the grass green.

With its 2,231 GDUs and 25.26 inches of precipitation and 46 inches of snowfall, Coeur d'Alene grows a forest that looks much different from the sagebrush along the Snake River plain.

The reality of all these numbers is that what works for one area is different for another area.

The heat that provides the Treasure and Magic valleys of Idaho some of the most valuable seed and dairy land in the world also puts them at peril if there is no water for the crops to drink.

However, living in a fertile desert with mountains and snow

It became painfully clear that our just-in-time food system might need updating to be ready just-in-case of crises.

The report we commissioned on public research funding also showed that agriculture would benefit from public research investments in six key areas: crop breeding, crop protection, animal health, animal disease and foodborne illness, climate research, and food and agriculture supply chains.

Discoveries in these fields would help agriculture meet the demands of a growing population and adapt to consumer trends.

Luckily, we have existing research programs in place at land grant universities across the country that would quickly put increased research funding to work.

Land grant universities not only have the researchers in place to develop new technologies, they also operate the county extension offices that farmers and ranchers, myself included, rely on for advice, expertise and guidance on the latest farming practices.

Our farms today look a lot different than they did just 20 or 30 years ago. We keep moving forward, looking for better ways to do things.

Farmers don't settle for "good enough." Every season farmers and ranchers are committed to fulfilling our mission to deliver nutritious and sustainable food, fuel and fiber for everyone.

Unlocking innovative new solutions through public agriculture research is an important investment in the future of our food supply. We can't afford not to. ■

allows our entire state to succeed in growing plants.

Despite its small population, Idaho is a heavyweight in the agricultural world and leads the nation in the production of several agricultural commodities, including potatoes, barley and food trout, and ranks very high in the production of many other crops and livestock.

But the thought that Idaho is some natural Garden of Eden for growing crops is an illusion. Someone who plants a seed in Idaho and then waits for Mother Nature alone to nurture it will be sorely disappointed.

The ingenuity of our water managers to use snowpack in the mountains to provide water to the desert of southern Idaho during the scorching summer months is the key to Idaho's success in the agricultural world.

Our reservoir and canal systems allow them to send excess water downstream to nourish crops along the entire Snake River.

Our most incredible natural resource in Idaho is our water. It does not come when or where we need it. Luckily, we can store it and distribute it during the hot summer months to water our crops and our communities.

Mountain snow, rich volcanic soils, and the right amount of heat from our sun, combined with a tiny seed in the spring and nourished through the season, is the key to Idaho's bounteous harvests.

Thank goodness for the stewards of our water and our land who work so hard to make it so. Without such tools, we would not know the true value of this great state. ■

of modern life, and those things largely come from urban areas.

The rural-urban divide is not a new issue and people have been trying to figure out how to bridge that gap for a long time. Way back in 1955, a group called the National Farm City Council started promoting better understanding between citizens in rural and urban areas.

But the divide between urban and rural areas of the country is growing and it's growing fast. In Idaho, for example, counties considered urban by the U.S. Census Bureau grew in population by 49.6 percent just from 2000 to 2019, while the state's rural counties grew by 15.1 percent during that same period.

I think one of the main reasons for the divide between urban and rural areas is a lack of communication between the two sides and a general misunderstanding of what life is like "on the other side."

There is no way someone who grew up and has lived their entire life in the "country" can understand the daily challenges someone who lives in a major city faces or what their hopes and goals are.

On the other hand, there is no way a true urbanite can understand what life on the farm or ranch is like.

A constant lament heard in farm country is that city folks don't know where their food really comes from.

A lot of people seem to think farmers are trying to "poison" their food or destroy the environment, which is patently absurd. No one cares more about the land than the farmer or rancher who makes their living off of it and was raised on that ground.

The vast majority – 96 percent – of farms in the United States are family owned and it's preposterous to think that the men and women who produce food and fiber, alongside their kids and grandkids, would remotely tolerate, even for a moment, the thought of raising food products that are bad for their fellow countrymen.

On the other hand, a lot of country folks might be guilty of thinking all city dwellers are out to get them and hate their way of life. I think the opposite might be true. I think a lot of urbanites would love to move to a rural area and raise a family there if they could do that.

I also think farmers would be pleasantly surprised to learn that they are held in high esteem by a lot, if not, most urbanites.

In the Farm Bureau organization, at the county, state and national level, finding ways to bridge the rural-urban divide has been a discussion that has occurred for several decades.

Perhaps one of the best ways to help bridge that gap is for the two sides to try to communicate better and help educate the other party about their way of life and what is important to them.

That means both sides setting aside their preconceived notions and truly listening to what the other side has to say. And when it comes to educating the other side – for example, about how food is produced – being patient and willing to listen to and address any concerns that are raised.

Recently my wife, Mary, and I attended meetings in Arizona. While there, we began to visit with a school teacher from Dallas.

As we got acquainted and began to discuss agriculture, she talked about how she was trying to eat healthier. One of the things she said she was doing was scrubbing off all the outsides of her fruits and veg-

etables with a cleaner. She had read or heard that his would remove all poisonous chemicals.

When she told us what she was using, it opened the door to have a conversation about the product she was using which probably had more harmful chemicals than those fruits and vegetables ever had.

We then had a conversation about why farmers have a need to use chemicals to be able to produce and provide an abundant, safe, quality food supply. We told her how all the chemicals we are permitted to use go through extensive testing to make sure there are no harmful residuals and that we must be licensed to apply those chemicals by the label rates.

She was very appreciative and open to the conversation and said, "I'm going to tell my friends what I learned from an actual farmer."

Us farmers and ranchers have opportunities all the time to tell the true story of agriculture through personal contact, social media, educational seminars and the list goes on and on. I invite each of us to share our story.

For those of you not involved in agriculture who are reading this, I urge you to be open to hearing what farmers and ranchers have to say about their occupation and learning from them.

For you farmers and ranchers reading this, I urge you to also be open to hearing from urbanites about what their concerns are regarding your occupation and address them in a patient, helpful matter.

Together, we can help bridge that urban-rural divide and bring our nation closer together. ■

1961 2021

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A letter from 27 of the nation's leading food and agriculture associations asks the U.S. agriculture secretary and trade representative to urgently address what they claim is a rapidly deteriorating trade relationship with Mexico when it comes to food and ag product exports, including potatoes.

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation graphic

Letter raises alarm over U.S.-Mexico food and ag trade

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – Twenty-seven of the nation's leading food and agriculture associations have raised the alarm over what they claim is a rapidly deteriorating trade relationship with Mexico when it comes to food and ag product exports.

That's a significant issue for Idaho's farming and ranching industry because Mexico is the No. 2 destination for farm product exports from Idaho.

Idaho's ag industry exported \$200 million worth of farm products to Mexico in 2020, according to U.S. Census Bureau data.

Of particular interest to Idaho's ag industry

when it comes to Mexico is that nation's ban on the importation of U.S. fresh potatoes throughout most of the country. Mexico currently allows fresh potatoes from the United States to be imported only within a 16-mile area along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The U.S. potato industry has been pushing Mexico to allow U.S. fresh potatoes throughout the entire nation for more than two decades and that issue is now before the Mexican Supreme Court.

A justice of that court released a draft ruling Feb. 17 that would overturn a lower court ruling preventing the Mexican federal government from implementing regulations to allow fresh U.S. potatoes to be imported throughout the country.

The case was scheduled to be decided by the five-member court on Feb. 24 but the vote has been postponed indefinitely.

The draft ruling provided some hope to members of the U.S. potato industry that the issue would finally be resolved, in their favor. But the postponement of the vote has dashed those hopes, for now.

"We've been dancing with them on this issue for more than 20 years; they don't want to allow fresh U.S. potatoes into Mexico," said American Falls farmer Klaren Koompin.

Idaho Potato Commission CEO Frank Muir said getting Mexico to allow fresh potatoes from the U.S. into the entire country has been one of the highest priorities for the U.S. and Idaho potato industries for a long time.

“From an international scope for expanding the Idaho potato industry, it has been our No. 1 priority for years,” he said. “It would be opening up one of the largest markets possible for U.S. potatoes. It would be significant.”

Idaho is the nation’s top producer of potatoes and opening up all of Mexico to fresh U.S. potatoes would be a big deal, said Koopin, a member of the National Potato Council’s board of directors.

According to the NPC, Mexico is the third largest export market for U.S. potatoes and potato products and more than \$270 million worth of potatoes and potato products from the United States were sold there in 2020.

Despite the 16-mile border zone restriction, Mexico is the second largest market for fresh U.S. potato exports, accounting for 106,000 metric tons valued at \$60 million in 2020.

According to NPC spokesman Mark Szymanski, the U.S. potato industry estimates that if the United States was able to export fresh potatoes into the entire country, it would provide a market potential of \$200 million per year in five years.

Mexico, a nation of 130 million people, “consumes a lot of potatoes,” Koopin said. “It would be a huge deal for Idaho and the U.S. potato industry. Any time potatoes are consumed – no matter where they are con-

sumed – it’s going to help Idaho.”

The U.S. and Mexican governments in 2002 announced both sides would resolve two long-standing market access issues – the U.S. agreed to expand market access for Mexican avocados and Mexico agreed to open the entire country to U.S. fresh potatoes.

The U.S. now imports about \$2 billion worth of Mexican avocados each year while Mexico remains mostly closed to fresh potatoes from the United States.

The Mexican government in 2011 agreed to allow U.S. potatoes full access to that country beginning in 2014. However, Mexico’s potato industry sued its government to prevent that from happening and that case is now before the Mexican Supreme Court.

“Full Mexican market access for fresh U.S. potatoes has been one of the highest priorities for the National Potato Council and the entire U.S. potato industry for well over two decades,” Jared Balcom, vice president of trade affairs for the NPC, said in a news release.

Using Mexico’s ban on U.S. fresh potatoes as one of its main examples, the NPC joined 26 other food and agriculture groups from the U.S. March 23 in sending a letter to Agriculture Secretary Thomas

Vilsack and U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai expressing concern over what they view as “alarming recent developments with regard to food and agriculture trade relationship with Mexico.”

“We respectfully urge your attention to this important but quickly deteriorating trade relationship,” the letter states.

According to the letter, the case before the Mexican Supreme Court “alleges that the Mexican government has no authority to provide market access to any agricultural commodity. A negative outcome in (this case) could have far-reaching impacts for U.S.-Mexico agricultural trade.”

Other concerns raised by the letter include increasing obstacles to dairy trade, an organic export certification requirement that could significantly disrupt exports of U.S. organic products to Mexico, a state-sponsored campaign disparaging corn sweeteners from the U.S., market access issues for U.S. meat and poultry products, and a cessation of review and approval of biotechnology applications.

“These issues, along with a high number of investigations on Mexico’s fresh produce exports to the U.S., hampers the competitiveness of U.S. farmers, ranchers and other members of the food and agriculture sector,” the letter states. ■

FAMILY

Continued from page 5

“But they don’t see the 40-year-old tractor that is ... still being used on a family farm and they don’t see the cowboy from the road,” he said. “They’re up in the brush gathering cattle.”

Dalley said he and his wife, Kimmel, who raised their children on a ranch in Idaho, had opportunities in the past to get “real” jobs with health and insurance benefits. The family operation at times has struggled financially, he said, but looking back, it was worth it to be able to raise their children on a farm and teach them the value of hard work.

“Now that we look back, it was worth it to us ... because we see how good our kids turned out,” Dalley said. “They are polite and they understand the value of work and they understand that you have to wake up at

3 in the morning sometimes to take care of things. That makes it worth it to us.”

Besides understanding that most farms in the United States are family owned and operated, Evan Call said he would also like consumers to know that most farmers, like his family, eat the crops they produce.

In the case of the Calls, they eat their own potatoes, grind their wheat themselves and turn it into bread and use the sugar that is produced from their beets.

“The farm food that we produce is safe,” he said. “There is a mindset among some people who are afraid of what’s being raised on the farms. Man, we deliver a good, clean, safe product ... that our own families eat.”

Other highlights from the NASS report:

- Small family farms – those with gross cash farm income (GCFI) of less than

\$350,000 per year – account for 45 percent of all direct sales to consumers, compared to 17 percent for mid-size family farms (GCFI between \$350,000 and \$999,999) and 23 percent for large-scale family farms (GCFI of \$1 million or more).

- Small family farms account for 88 percent of all farms in the U.S.

- The majority of small family farms specialize in cattle (34 percent) or “other crops” such as hay and forage production (23 percent). More than half (53 percent) of mid-size farms specialize in grains and oilseeds. Large-scale family farms vary more in product specialization, although they are more likely than other family farms to specialize in dairy production or specialty crops, which include fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits and horticulture and nursery crops. ■



Photo by Sean Ellis

Michael Parrella, dean of University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, second from left, speaks with farm industry leaders in February 2019 about a \$7 million plan to modernize the university's Parma ag research center.

\$7 million Parma research center upgrade is a go

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

PARMA – The proposed \$7 million renovation of University of Idaho's Parma Agricultural Research and Extension center is now officially moving forward.

The Idaho Legislature approved a bill that provides \$3 million

in state money toward the project to upgrade the Parma research station. The legislation passed the House and Senate by a combined vote of 91-9 and Gov. Brad Little signed it into law March 17.

The legislation “speaks to broad support from the legislature and governor for the college and for agriculture,” said Michael Parrella, dean of UI's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences,

which oversees Parma and eight other ag and Extension research centers across the state. “We’re pretty excited about this.”

The college plans to break ground on the project next spring or summer and hopes to have it completed in 2023.

The modernized facility will include new graduate student housing, updated laboratories and equipment, new greenhouses and four new positions: an Extension fruit and viticulture specialist, a weed scientist, an irrigation and soil scientist and a scientist that specializes in pollination.

The renovation project represents a dramatic turnaround in the fate of the Parma research center, which was slated for closure in 2009 and was actually closed on paper at one point until members of the state’s agricultural industry rallied to keep it open.

Now it’s slated for a revival and industry again played a major role in making that happen.

The plan for the project is to use \$3 million in state funds, \$3 million in funding from industry and \$1 million from CALS, which also provides \$1.5 million in funding for the Parma station annually.

A broad group of industry organizations, agribusinesses and individual farmers provided a total of \$3 million in funding for the project. That includes \$1.9 million from corporate partners and philanthropic foundations, \$685,000 from agricultural commodity groups and \$415,000 from individual donors and ag producers.

Nine of Idaho’s farm commodity groups contributed to the effort, including organizations representing the sugar beet, apple, barley, bean, hop, mint, onion, wine and alfalfa and clover seed industries.

Parrella said it was nice to see industry step up and put “skin in the game.”

“It’s exceptionally gratifying to see that,” he said. “It’s just remarkable.”

A wide array of research is conducted on multiple crops at the 200-acre research center, including beans, potatoes, onions, hops, mint, tree fruit, wine and table grapes, grains and seed crops.

The Idaho Bean Commission was one of the groups that contributed financially to the renovation project.

“Parma is very important to the state’s bean industry,” said IBC Administrator Andi Woolf-Weiby. “It is a vital center for bean research in Idaho.”

Amalgamated Sugar Co. is contributing \$500,000 to the project. Amalgamated is the second-largest beet sugar producer in the United States and operates plants in Nampa, Twin Falls and Paul.

“For years, agriculture in the Northwest has benefited greatly from the high-quality research performed at the facility,” Amalgamated Sugar CEO John McCreedy said in a news release announcing the company’s contribution. “The investments in state-of-the-art plant and soil health facilities by the state of Idaho, University of Idaho and the private sector will continue the tradition of delivering top-notch agricultural research to all stakeholders.”

During a tour of the Parma facility in June 2016, shortly after taking over as the new CALS dean, Parrella told researchers and industry members that he solidly backed the station and was fully committed to investing in it.



This is an artist’s rendering of a \$7 million plan by University of Idaho’s College of Agricultural and Life Sciences to modernize the university’s Parma ag research center. The planned renovation is moving forward and the project could be completed in 2023.

In March 2018, Parrella hosted a listening session on the future of the Parma station with dozens of industry members.

That was the genesis of the current renovation plan and the four new research positions are a direct result of what industry stakeholders said they wanted at the Parma station, Parrella said.

“It’s not the university suggesting these new positions,” he said. “They really came from the industry and we’re responding to what they need.”

Parrella said the research conducted at Parma will benefit farmers across the state, not just in that region. The four new research positions that will be added there will bring the total number of research faculty at the Parma center to 10 and they will study everything from bugs to weeds to water and soil, in addition to crops.

“We’re excited about what the (upgraded Parma center) will bring to the state’s agricultural industry,” he said.

The Parma ag research station was built in 1925 and the facilities there are more than 50 years old and badly in need of upgrading, Parrella said.

The college’s other ag research stations around the state also need to be upgraded, he said.

“The goal is absolutely to look at each of the research and Extension centers and see what kind of investment is needed there,” he said. “We’re hoping that Parma is a model that can be followed at those other R and E centers.”

Carly Schoepflin, director of communications and strategic initiatives for CALS, said the college plans to use the successful Parma project as a template for investments at the other ag research centers.

“You start with a listening session, hear from industry, hear what they need at those facilities, and then create a shared vision that ideally benefits all parties,” she said. ■



Photos by Steve Stuebner

Sheep graze on alfalfa.

Eternal optimism prevails

Sheep rancher survives the weird COVID year

By **Steve Stuebner**
Life on the Range

Emmett sheep rancher John Peterson is an eternal optimist.

He loves being a sheep rancher. He's done it for 30 years and counting.

"I like being out here. I like working for myself," Peterson says. "I taught school for three years, I poured concrete and did construction work as we worked into the sheep biz. You're your own boss. I have to remind myself, going up to herder's camps, be happy and be thankful. You could be in an office somewhere or still pouring concrete."

Peterson's wife, Anita, has Basque roots, a deep connection to the sheep industry.

"My wife and I grew up in Idaho as kids. Anywhere you went camping, you usually had to drive through bands of sheep," he says. "I was always fascinated by it. Thought it'd be a fun way to make a living. Fun is not the right word probably, but it's always been interesting, you know."

Going into the 2020 grazing season, Peterson faced two new challenges. A major tussock moth outbreak on Packer John Mountain forced Peterson to reduce his sheep numbers.

The bug infestation led to salvage logging activities. By reducing his herd, he

could zigzag around the logging activities and stay in business.

And then in March 2020, Peterson and sheep ranchers around the West got caught in the cross-hairs of the COVID-19 pandemic. Suddenly lamb prices plummeted badly.

"When the pandemic hit, everything shut down," says Sam Boyd, a marketing specialist with the Rocky Mountain Sheep Association. "Cruise lines and restaurants throughout the country shut down, and that's where the majority of the lamb in this country is sold into and consumed.

"It's been quite a devastation. The prices have come down 40-45 percent from

where they were, and it's leading to some financial struggles for these producers."

When Peterson shipped his sheep to market last fall, prices were bad. But within weeks, the market suddenly changed.

"We put them in a feedlot in California, and fed them, and it turned out good for us," Peterson says. "The market improved and came back and strengthened substantially."

This is the uncertain life of a modern-day sheep producer – they have to cope with many variables almost every day, every year. But Peterson is OK with that.

Seeing a new crop of baby lambs being born in good weather conditions gets Peterson revved up.

"I think the lambs look real good. Real promising. So that's good," he says. "Yeah, I'm optimistic, it's a lot more fun when there is optimism; you think boy, these lambs might be worth something this year. This year looks promising, real promising."

The Life on the Range crew followed Peterson's sheep flocks for a year, from lambing to shipping. Please follow along and learn what's involved in raising quality lambs, following the green, from the low country to the high country of Idaho.

Lambing

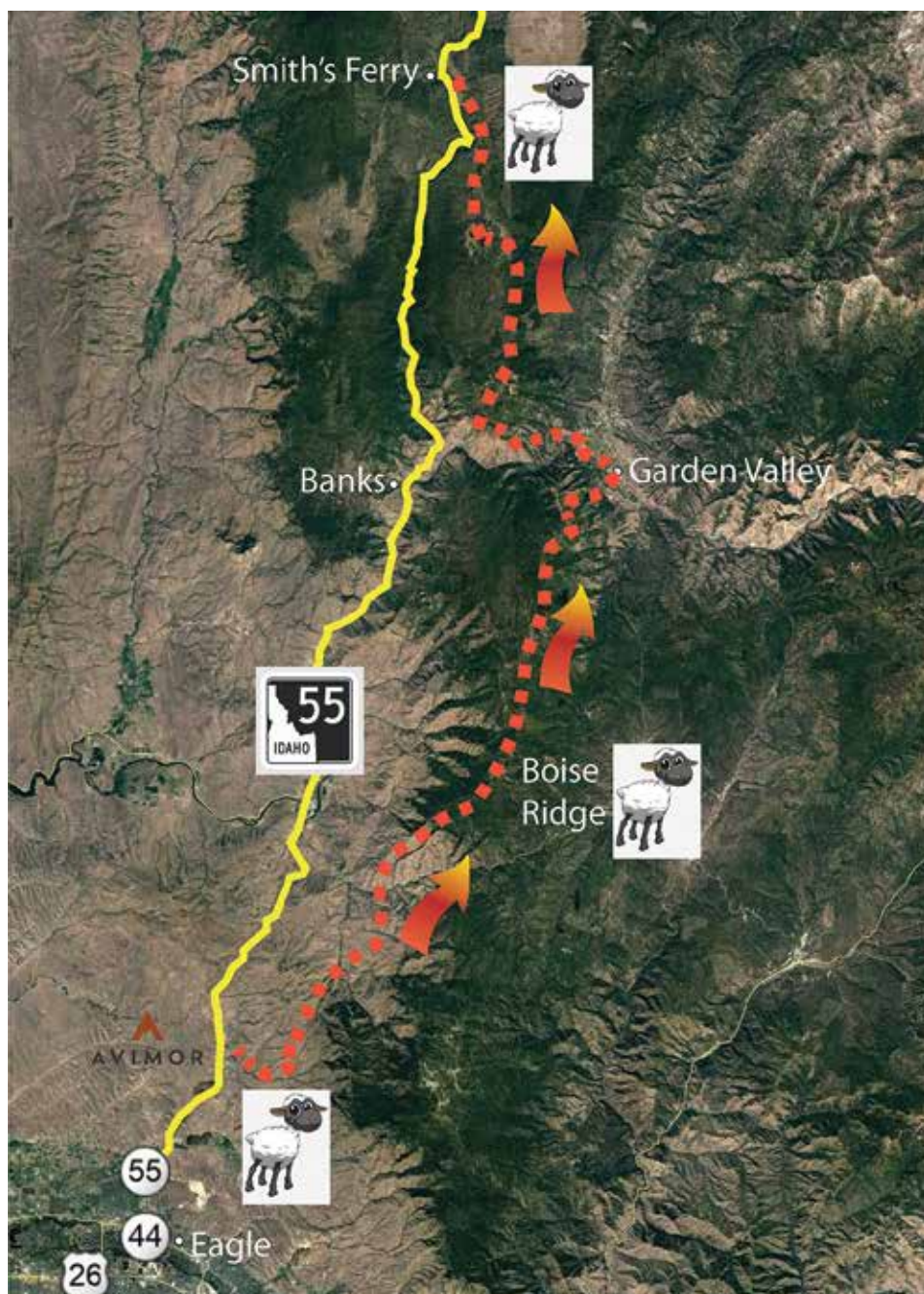
Lambing begins in January at the Peterson Ranch. The ewes came into lambing season fat and jolly from grazing on alfalfa fields nearby.

"The ewes have lambed well. The ewes came in in good shape. They were on hay fields all fall, more than we could get to. That doesn't happen every year," Peterson says.

In mid-January, the ewes begin giving birth to lambs. Peterson's helpers quickly move the mother ewes into the lambing shed to keep the newborns out of the wind and cold.

"Every ewe comes in with her lambs," he says. "We put them in these pens. They're here for 2-3 days. The ewe goes out into these sun pens, the pens are mucked out, they're re-bedded, and we're ready for the next bunch.

"The guys are continually picking up ewes that have lambed. The weather's been mild, so it's not that crucial, but sometimes, you need to get them in right away."



John Peterson's sheep route

While the ewes and lambs are in the shed, they get a unique paint-brand number to keep the ewes and lambs together.

"We like to keep them in here for as long as we can keep them in, they all do better," he says.

And then, the ewes and lambs are moved outside.

"They go out in the sun pens out here," Peterson says. "We put together two ewes with twins or four ewes with singles, and it's just a matter of mixing them in with

larger bunches, until they end up in these pastures with groups of 250 ewes and lambs and that's a truckload."

Some ewes have twins; some have singles; but ultimately, they try to get two lambs paired up with each ewe through grafting.

"We graft a lot of lambs," he says. "Your feed costs are higher and your labor costs are higher when you shed-lamb, so you've got to try to get twins on every ewe you can."



Lambs are put into temporary corrals before they are loaded onto trucks.

Spring Range at Avimor

In early April, the foothills above the Avimor Community begin to green up, and it's time for Peterson to truck the sheep to a drop-off point on the edge of the subdivision.

Some Avimor residents come out to watch and take pictures.

From this point forward, the sheep will follow the green-up on a Big Journey from Avimor to the Boise Ridge to Garden Valley to Smith's Ferry. The grazing season will finish up in late August, when the lambs are shipped to market.

The Big Journey is 65 miles by highway from point to point, but it's at least twice that far going through the mountains.

Peterson's herders are ready for the long journey, with face-masks to prevent the spread of COVID. They'll be camping outdoors with the sheep for the next six months.

A number of livestock guardian dogs

will tag along with the sheep as a non-lethal method of predator control. The dogs keep the coyotes at bay, and they also defend the sheep from mountain lions, black bears and wolves.

"The coyotes, they'll nickel and dime you, they'll try to take a lamb every night if they can, but they're not a threat to kill in big numbers," Peterson says. "Last year, we had wolves all around us on our summer range, and we had no confirmed kills, and that's because we had the best combination of dogs that we've had."

Guard dogs are very protective of the sheep, and that means they can be a bit testy around hikers and mountain bikers when the sheep are grazing around recreation trails.

Peterson has talked to Avimor residents about what to do.

"We put out signs. We talked to people," he says. "The white dogs, they're protective of the sheep. Get off your bike. Talk to

them. If you act like you're running from them, they'll think you're prey. You stop and talk to them. Let them know you're human."

Walkers and joggers should leash their pets when sheep and guard dogs are in the area. Avimor has more than 20 miles of hiking and biking trails in the area and recreationists are co-existing with the sheep and guard dogs.

"The biggest part is education," he says. "We make an effort to work with the people. They're supportive of what we do. I keep my head down, and graze through there and no problems!"

In late April, the sheep are bedded down in a grassy mountain bowl next to the Broken Horn Trail in Avimor. It's quiet and the sheep are happy. The sheep herder's camp is located on a hilltop nearby, with the pack stock grazing quietly beside the tent.

Stack Rock, an iconic feature near Bogus Basin Ski Area, can be seen off in the distance.

Heading north on the Boise Ridge

As the green-up occurs in May, Peterson's sheep move up on the Boise Ridge and graze slowly toward Harris Creek Summit and continue toward Garden Valley.

In the early summer of 2020, the weather stayed cool, wet and snowy almost into June.

Finally, spring gave way to summer and the ewes and lambs had tons of forage to eat on their way down the mountains into Garden Valley.

The sheep grazed in succulent green meadows in Garden Valley on a late June evening. Even the elk thought it was a perfect place to be.

The following morning, Peterson and his crew drove the sheep from the meadows to the little town of Crouch via the Banks to Lowman Highway.

They started at 6 a.m. to avoid disrupting vehicle traffic and it all went smooth. The sheep passed through Crouch and then north on the Middle Fork Road.

Eventually, they steered the sheep into a private land meadow, where the animals could hang out and graze after the busy morning.

"I always worry when they're on the highway," Peterson says. "This morning went as good as it could. There was very little traffic, cool today, the sheep, they moved, nobody mad, nobody had to go anywhere in a hurry. Four-and-a-half miles and started a little before 6, and now it's 7:30."

The sheep looked happy grazing in the tall-grass meadow and the lambs were doing well. The cool and wet June weather provided plenty of feed for the sheep.

"I don't want jinx anything, but I think they look a little better. Seems like any year I think that, then I'm wrong. So, I'm not going to say," he says.

Peterson says landowners like him to graze his sheep around their homes to keep the fire danger down.

"With all of the forage this spring, people that live with homes in the timber like this are concerned about fire," he says. "The cabin owners, they used to shoo us away, and now they ask the herders to come down and graze a little more time around their property?"

By this time, the COVID-19 pandemic



A guard dog watches the sheep.

had swept the world and lamb prices went south. Peterson was well-aware.

"The thing that matters now is what will the lambs be worth in the fall in the end of August, when they come to the corrals," he says. "That's the unknown this year. The way the market is now, it could be a \$1.30 or \$1.40, which is well below our break-even..."

But Peterson is still optimistic.

"It's been a good year; the lambs look good, and I think we're supposed to get rain tomorrow," he says. "Some of the country up high might not be even ready yet."

Now Peterson's sheep will be moving north toward Packer John Mountain, where the tussock moth outbreak occurred, and salvage logging activities were going full-bore during the summer of 2020. You could see dust rising from log truck traffic all over the mountain.

Summer Range – Packer John Mountain

About 13,000 acres of timber were affected by the tussock moth outbreak, and the Idaho Department of Lands plans to harvest about 6,400 acres of timber, mostly Douglas fir, to salvage their value.

IDL officials helped Peterson plan a safe route across Packer John Mountain for the sheep to pass through.

"John's been really great to work with. I've worked with him over 10 years," says Dean Johnson, a range specialist for the

IDL. "It is going to be an effect on his operation because of the size of this outbreak. So we'll work with him this fall and continue to work with him the best we can so we can find other routes around the plantation and harvesting activities."

Following the salvage logging, protecting the tree plantations will be a big priority in the next couple of years, Johnson says.

"We're going to plant about 1.4 million trees on these 6,400 acres. We usually like to have a success ratio of 20-60%. We like to get 125 trees an acre," he says.

"The concern is to keep the sheep from eating the tops of the trees or trample them," Johnson says. "The sheep don't normally like to eat the trees, but there's so much grass and stuff around them that they could eat the tops of the trees or trample them, and that could ruin the plantation as well."

So those will be concerns in future years. But in the summer of 2020, Peterson's crew just had to herd the sheep around logging operations and log truck traffic.

Packer John Mountain is so big, rising to 7,100 feet elevation, with many flanks and ridges, that the sheep had an abundance of feed on their way to Smith's Ferry.

A Peruvian herder on horseback rides over the summit of Packer John with guard dogs and border collies in tow. Early snow hints at the coming fall.



TOP: Sheep in Crouch. BOTTOM: The guard dogs of Emmett rancher John Peterson's sheep operation did a good job guarding the sheep this past year and the operation did not have any significant losses from predators.

Shipping Lambs in Smith's Ferry

On a sunny day at the end of August, Peterson's herders brought the sheep down into a vast meadow next to the Payette River.

The long hike from Avimor ends here. Tomorrow morning, the lambs will be loaded up on livestock trucks and shipped to a feedyard in California.


This has been a weird year for Peterson in a lot of ways with the COVID pandemic and other issues.

Prices are still bad. Peterson has no idea what kind of price he's going to get for his lambs. He gets one paycheck a year at harvest time to cover a year's worth of expenses, so it's a huge deal.

"I was talking to my wife the other day. I don't sleep very well, it's a unique

See **SHEEP**, page 19





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Photo by Joel Benson

The reservoirs and Snake River in southern Idaho have allowed farmers to produce an abundance of agricultural commodities in a desert environment. That requires a lot of water and according to U.S. Geological Survey data, Idaho ranks No. 2 in the nation in total water withdrawals for irrigation. In this photo in central Idaho, an irrigated plot of farmland is surrounded by non-irrigated ground.

Idaho ranks No. 2 in total irrigation withdrawals

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – Idaho ranks No. 2 in the nation when it comes to total water withdrawn – diverted from rivers or pumped from the ground – for irrigation.

California leads the United States in total water withdrawn for irrigation, which is no big surprise given that the Golden State produces far more food than any other state and most countries.

But Idaho is a solid second in the irrigation withdrawal category, well ahead of No. 3 Arkansas.

According to U.S. Geological Survey data calculated by University of Idaho Agricultural Economist Garth Taylor, about 17 million acre-feet of water per year is withdrawn in Idaho for

irrigation use.

“That is a total shock to me,” he said of Idaho ranking No. 2 in total irrigation withdrawals. “That we are ahead of every other state except for California, including big ag states like Texas and Nebraska, is amazing.”

Taylor said Idaho’s significant use of water for irrigation should not be viewed as a bad thing. The state ranks No. 3 in the West in total farm-gate revenue and is one of the global leaders in seed production.

Idaho ranks No. 1 in the nation in the production of potatoes, barley and food trout and ranks near the top in several other agricultural commodities, including milk, wheat, sugar beets, dry bean seed, chickpeas and hops.

“Idaho uses a lot of water and that is not a bad thing, to use the natural resources you are endowed with,” Taylor said. “It’s

used to grow food for the world and that is a good thing and that has to be accomplished by using water. This is not something to be ashamed of or that should be swept under the rug.”

According to Taylor’s calculations, about 97 percent of the water withdrawn in Idaho is used for agriculture.

Idaho ranks fifth in the U.S. in total irrigated acres but most of the state’s agricultural production occurs in southern Idaho, which is mostly desert. That means a lot of water has to be withdrawn to produce food in that part of the state.

The extensive reservoir systems in southern Idaho supply the farms in the region with adequate irrigation water during the hot summer months.

Those reservoirs, and the Snake River, are tremendous resources for Idaho’s agricultural community, Taylor said.

Brian Olmstead, general manager of the Twin Falls Canal Co., was not surprised to hear that Idaho ranks No. 2 in the United States in irrigation withdrawals.

“I know we divert a lot of water in Idaho,” he said. “If you grow a crop out here in the desert, it plain takes a lot of water. You just don’t grow a crop here in Idaho without diverting a lot of water.”

Agriculture is the most important part of Idaho’s overall economy, Taylor said, and the state is using one of its best natural resources, water, “to grow food, grow the Idaho economy

and make people’s lives better.”

He said he has heard some people say it’s a shame that Idaho uses that much water but he disagrees.

What would be a shame, Taylor said, “Is if Idaho allowed the Snake River to flow to the Pacific Ocean without using that water.”

Agriculture is big business in Idaho and so is ag water.

Six Idaho counties rank in the top 20 counties in the United States in total irrigation water use. In order, they are Jefferson, which ranks No. 6 in the U.S. in that category, Jerome (9), Twin Falls (15), Bingham (16), Cassia (18) and Ada (19) counties.

Most of the other counties in the top 20 are in California.

Taylor said it should be noted those rankings measure which county the water is withdrawn from. In the case of Ada County, for example, the New York Canal originates out of that county but most of the water is used in Canyon County.

He said it should also be noted that despite Idaho’s No. 2 ranking in total irrigation withdrawals, total water use in Idaho has been declining since the mid-1980s.

That’s because a lot of farms in the state have switched from using gravity irrigation to sprinkler or drip irrigation.

According to Taylor’s calculations based on USGS data, total water use in Idaho has decreased by more than 20 percent since 1985. ■

SHEEP

Continued from page 16

job in that you have only one paycheck,” Peterson says. “Probably a feeling like you might get gambling, you come to the corrals and then you go to the scales, it’s kind of suspenseful.”

While Peterson waits to see how much his lambs weigh on the truck scales tomorrow morning, his family and friends gather for an evening lamb feed and camp-out on site.

Everyone wakes early at dawn to get ready to help load the lambs on the sheep trucks.

They set up temporary corrals to hold the sheep overnight.

They get the loading chute ready on the truck. Peterson’s son, Penn, separates the lambs from the ewes as they come down the chute, single-file. It all happens very quickly.

In a matter of a couple hours, the sheep trucks are loaded and head to the Horse-shoe Bend truck scale to check on the weights.

It turns out that Peterson’s lambs had a



Sheep walk through the snow on Boise Ridge.

great year. The lambs weighed an average of 128 pounds.

“That’s the best they’ve weighed ... maybe the second best of all time,” Peterson says.

Three things need to come together to make a profit in the sheep business, Peterson says.

* You need a good lamb crop at lambing time.

* You need good weights on the lambs at shipping time.

* You need a good price for lambs.

Peterson put his lambs on feed and waited for prices to improve. Fortunately,

they did!

Every year is different, and even in a year with multiple curve balls, Peterson is upbeat. None of his herders got COVID, losses to predators were minimal, and they soldiered through all of the tough issues.

“I think it’s a wonderful way of life. I think it’s a wonderful industry,” he says.

Steve Stuebner is the writer and producer of Life on the Range, a public education project sponsored by the Laura M. Cunningham Foundation. ■

Idaho Farm Bureau

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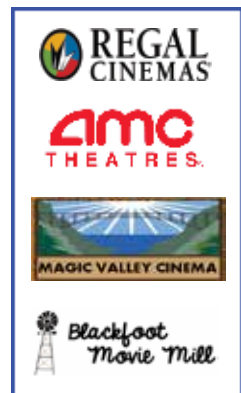
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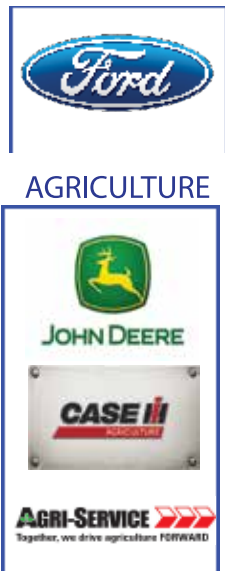
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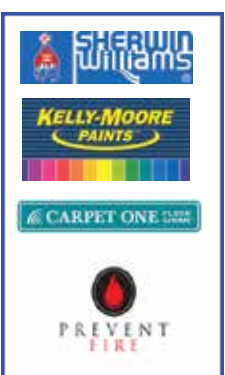
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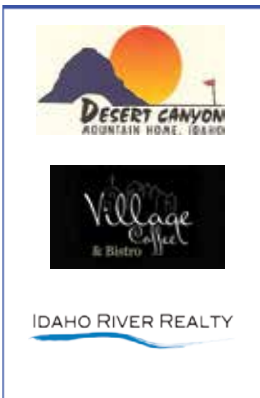
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EASTERN IDAHO



SOUTHWEST IDAHO



SOUTHCENTRAL IDAHO



NORTH IDAHO





Photo by Sean Ellis

Sugar beets are harvested in a field near Burley in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo. Cassia County leads the state in beef and dairy cow numbers but it's also one of Idaho's top crop-producing counties.

Cassia County is the poster child for ag in Idaho

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BURLEY –When you think agriculture in Idaho, Cassia County is the poster child. Cassia ranks an unchallenged No. 1 in the state when it comes to total farm revenue and produces a wide variety of agricultural commodities on a large scale.

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, farmers and ranchers in Cassia

County brought in a total of \$927 million in farm cash receipts that census year, making Cassia by far the top county in Idaho in that category, comfortably ahead of No. 2 Gooding County (\$783 million).

Of that \$927 million total, \$671 million came from the livestock sector. The county ranks No. 1 in farm cash receipts in the state in both the dairy and beef cattle sectors, Idaho's top two agricultural commodities in terms of farm revenue.

But Cassia is also a major crop growing county, as farmers there brought in a total of \$255 million in cash receipts during the 2017 census year. In fact, if you just counted crops alone, Cassia would have ranked No. 11 among Idaho's 44 counties in 2017 in total farm revenue.

“Many farms (in Cassia County) are diversified and produce a variety of crops,” said Oakley rancher Paul Marchant, president of Cassia County Farm Bureau.

“Cassia County is a leader in several commodities, including potatoes, dry edible beans, sugar beets, corn silage, alfalfa, wheat and barley.”

“There are so many farmable acres in that county,” said Idaho Dairywomen’s Association Executive Director Rick Naerebout. “They have a huge ag base there.”

Ben Beck, who owns a farm and ranch near Burley, said a lot of feed crops for the livestock industry are grown in the county.

“They have to be able to feed the cows,” he said.

Besides Idaho’s main crops, a lot of other “minor” crops are grown in Cassia County, including safflower, sunflower and quinoa, said CCFB Vice President Lynn Steadman.

“Cassia County is probably one of the most diverse agricultural counties in the state,” Steadman said.

But while a lot of crops are grown in the county, the livestock industry is the major contributor there when it comes to farm cash receipts.

“Cassia County is a leader in beef production and is home to some large feeding operations, as well as a processing facility,” Marchant said.

Milk is Idaho’s top agricultural commodity in terms of cash receipts – beef cattle ranks No. 2 – and Cassia County is the state’s top county for milk production.

According to Naerebout, Cassia passed Gooding County a couple of years ago for the top spot in total cow numbers and now has about 20,000 more cows than Gooding.

And the dairy industry continues to grow in Cassia County, he said.

“There are definitely dairywomen in that area that are looking to expand their operations,” Naerebout said.

Cassia also leads the state in pig production and has 8,075 sheep and lambs and 659 goats. NASS did not list the number of pigs in the county to protect private data.

Marchant said all the allied industries that support all facets of agriculture in Cassia County play a significant role in the county’s economy.

“Many farmers and ranchers in the county are involved not only in farming, but in the supporting industries – crop consulting, artificial insemination, fertilizer, ag fabrication – as well,” he said.



Photo by Joel Benson

Cassia County, shown here, is the poster child for agriculture in Idaho.

According to 2017 Census of Ag data, there were 585 farms in Cassia County in 2017 and the average size was 1,100 acres, more than double the average size of the average Idaho farm (468 acres).

The average market value of products sold on a farm in Cassia County was \$1.6 million, more than five times the statewide average of \$303,000.

Average net cash farm income per farm in Cassia County in 2017 was \$235,000, almost five times the statewide average of \$53,000.

While Cassia is a solid agricultural county, its population is growing rapidly and Beck, a member of Cassia County Farm Bureau’s board of directors, believes the rapid development occurring there will be a main focus of the organization’s future efforts.

“It’s developing like crazy and it’s just getting started,” he said. “I think the rapid development is definitely going to be our biggest issue.”

Ensuring newcomers, as well as current

county residents, are educated about agriculture and the important role it plays in Idaho’s economy, is already a major focus of CCFB.

Steadman, chairman of CCFB’s Promotion and Education Committee, hosted a farm tour for Burley FFA members in the fall of 2019 and the committee had planned to host similar tours for the county’s other high schools in the spring of 2020 but the restrictions related to COVID-19 put a halt to those plans.

The 2019 tour took 80 FFA students to a robotics dairy and a sod farm and CCFB sponsored the buses and lunch.

“It was an absolutely wonderful event,” Steadman said.

He said the P&E Committee plans to restart the FFA tours and also become involved in teaching elementary school students about agriculture.

“We’re hoping by next fall to be heavily involved in every one of the elementary schools in the county in educating and teaching kids about agriculture,” he said. ■



Photo by Joel Benson

Hay is compressed at Driscoll TopHay, located on the grounds of the Pocatello Regional Airport, in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo. Hay is the commodity that is expected to benefit the most from an intermodal facility being built in Pocatello.

Intermodal facility could benefit several ag commodities

By **John O'Connell**
Intermountain Farm and Ranch

POCATELLO — Exporting containers filled with locally grown oilseeds to China and other Asian markets will soon be a shorter, simpler and cheaper process for Bill Meadows.

Meadows, owner of American Falls-based Mountain States Oilseeds, anticipates saving at least \$45,000 in annual shipping costs once the Utah transportation and logistics company Savage opens a planned intermodal rail terminal in Pocatello.

At the moment, empty 20-foot and 40-foot shipping containers are hauled on trucks from Salt Lake City to his business. Meadows has two hours upon receiving a container to fill it with a com-

modity, such as oriental mustard, and send it back to Utah.

The cargo is then sent by rail to the Port of Los Angeles or the Port of San Francisco to be shipped abroad.

By the middle of this year, however, Savage plans to open Idaho's first intermodal rail terminal at the Pocatello rail yard.

Once that happens, area shippers of agricultural goods, such as Meadows, will access containers close to home and quickly get them on a direct rail line to the Port of Seattle or the Port of Tacoma in Washington.

"The big cost of the container is transporting it from Salt Lake to here and back to Salt Lake," Meadows said. "I think by having a container yard in Pocatello that cost will be cut in half."

Meadows now ships more than 180 containers to Asia per year,

and he said the market is rapidly growing. He has tripled his business in Asia during the past three years, and he anticipates his annual shipments will further increase to between 400 and 500 containers within the next two years.

“We have roughly 65% of our business (that) goes overseas in the mustard market,” Meadows said.

Officials say the region’s hay growers will be the primary beneficiaries of the facility, which is planned in partnership with Union Pacific Railroad.

“You can’t drive to Salt Lake City without seeing 30 to 40 (trucks hauling containers of hay),” Meadows said. “Those will all be switched over to Pocatello. There’s enough business here to make it work.”

Driscoll TopHay, located on the grounds of the Pocatello Regional Airport, is expected to be a major user of the intermodal facility.

Will Ricks, president of the Idaho Hay & Forage Association, believes the facility will also benefit his Hamer-based business, Highland Hay. About 75% of his hay crop is shipped abroad — currently out of Salt Lake City.

Ricks said the facility should even benefit growers who sell domestically by moving more hay out of the country, thereby reducing domestic supply and improving prices.

“It sounds like it’s going to be something that’s really going to be good for Eastern Idaho,” Ricks said.

Idaho grain growers are also optimistic about the facility’s potential to boost their bottom lines.

Laura Wilder, executive director of the Idaho Barley Commission, said about a quarter of the state’s barley crop is now exported to foreign markets — mainly sold as malt to Mexico. Wilder said her organization receives constant inquiries about Idaho barley for export.

“If this opens up new channels and new opportunities for companies and individuals not currently taking advantage of the export market it would definitely be a good thing for the Idaho barley industry,” Wilder said.

Wilder sees potential for the facility to make food barley a viable crop for growers in Eastern Idaho. Food barley is popular in Japan and South Korea as a rice extender, but it has primarily been grown by farmers in Northern Idaho, who are much closer to Washington ports and have a freight advantage in reaching Asian markets.

Initially, Savage spokesman Jeff Hymas said, the facility will load about 150 containers per week on 75 rail cars. By the year’s end, Hymas said Savage hopes to be shipping up to 250 containers per week on 125 rail cars from the Pocatello facility.

Hymas said the facility may eventually handle refrigerated commodities, such as potatoes or dairy. For the time being, he said dehydrated milk and potato flakes can be moved.

Oakley farmer Randy Hardy, who is chairman of Sun Valley Potatoes, believes potato growers will benefit indirectly if the facility helps them ship other crops in their rotations.

“I think it can definitely be a boost to our area,” Hardy said.

Hardy’s hope is that Union Pacific will start a refrigerated unit train serving Idaho with direct service to the state’s major domes-



Photo by Joel Benson

Hay is stacked at Driscoll TopHay, located on the grounds of the Pocatello Regional Airport, in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo. Hay is the commodity that is expected to benefit the most from an intermodal facility being built in Pocatello.

tic export markets in New York and Florida.

Shawn Boyle, president and general counsel with the Idaho Grower Shippers Association, has been communicating with Savage about its plans for a few years, and he believes it may eventually open the door for Idaho fresh potato growers to tap a new market — at least once Savage can offer refrigerated service.

“It really puts us five to 10 days closer to Asia than we were before,” Boyle said.

Boyle also believes the project helps to get the railroad’s attention, further establishing Southeast Idaho as a major rail hub.

Idaho Potato Commission President and CEO Frank Muir believes the popularity of Idaho potatoes in foreign markets will fuel demand for exports of all classes of potatoes and potato products from the Gem State.

“When we first started this effort to ship internationally, the first thing I was told is, ‘You can’t do it because you’re nowhere near a port,’” Muir recalled. “I said, ‘If we were a commodity that would be an issue, but we’re not a commodity. We’re a brand.’”

Kristen South, a public relations official with Union Pacific, said it would be premature for the railroad to discuss additional future services, such as an eastbound refrigerated unit train or the addition of refrigerated cars to the forthcoming intermodal facility.

South said trains from the Pocatello intermodal facility will take 2.5 days to reach a Washington port and will make a single stop to change crews.

“Union Pacific is providing Savage access to property and track along with a service product that allows Savage to ramp up volume,” South said via email. “...What’s great about the partnership is that instead of moving empty containers, we can fill them, primarily with hay exports going back to Asia.” ■

Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins



“The wind stopped suddenly, didn’t it?”



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Word Search

Springtime

S	P	K	C	I	L	O	R	F	A	R	M	E	R	L	W
P	U	D	D	L	E	S	H	M	T	S	E	N	A	B	H
L	M	N	E	W	Z	Z	W	M	O	O	L	B	I	U	M
O	C	F	S	W	E	A	T	H	E	R	T	F	N	D	C
W	L	E	S	H	O	W	E	R	S	A	L	G	D	S	B
S	E	H	P	K	I	P	L	E	R	W	I	N	D	Y	L
D	A	P	R	I	L	N	W	F	W	A	R	M	E	R	J
S	N	W	O	F	B	M	E	R	P	K	N	D	R	L	F
L	P	N	U	R	U	P	C	E	L	E	B	R	A	T	E
T	L	R	T	I	S	N	T	S	Z	N	T	I	R	H	P
P	A	S	I	E	G	N	A	H	C	B	S	Z	P	A	N
M	N	T	H	N	E	D	R	A	G	T	P	Z	H	W	C
W	T	H	K	D	G	Z	S	R	E	W	O	L	F	L	W
C	R	O	P	S	H	G	R	O	W	B	C	E	H	K	G

April	Crops	Garden	Puddles	Sunshine
Awaken	Drizzle	Grow	Rain	Thaw
Bloom	Farmer	Melt	Refresh	Warmer
Buds	Flowers	Nest	Seed	Weather
Celebrate	Friends	New	Showers	Windy
Change	Frolic	Plant	Spring	
Clean	Fun	Plow	Sprout	

EXPORTS

Continued from page 3

The government-ordered shutdowns related to COVID have created several hurdles for businesses, including those that export agricultural products.

But people still have to eat and the Census Bureau data shows that Idaho companies are still finding ways to get their products into the hands of consumers around the world.

Mexico, the No. 2 destination for Idaho ag products in 2020 in terms of total value, is an example of how COVID has created significant challenges for Idaho ag product exporters.

Idaho companies sold \$200 million worth of farm products in that nation last year, which represents an 8 percent decrease compared with 2019.

When it came to the total value of Idaho exports last year, Mexico saw the largest decline in total dollar volume, said Doug Robison, the Idaho president of Northwest Farm Credit Services.

After increasing 4 percent through mid-year, the total value of Idaho's ag exports to Mexico fell significantly in the second half of the year and were down by \$18 million for the entire year, he said.

See EXPORTS, page 31



Photo by Sean Ellis

Sheep are herded in a field in southcentral Idaho in January. The total value of Idaho ag product exports rose 3 percent in 2020, to \$927 million.



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EXPORTS

Continued from page 29

“Despite relative strength in the Mexican peso during the latter half of 2020, closures in the hotel and restaurant sectors negatively impacted overall demand for agricultural products from the United States,” Robison said.

But Idaho ag exporters obviously found other opportunities, especially in Asia.

Idaho’s growth in ag export value last year was largely driven by increased exports to Asia, Robison said.

The value of Idaho ag exports to China, the No. 3 destination for Idaho farm product exports, totaled \$73 million in 2020, up 28 percent compared with 2019. Idaho ag exports to Japan, the No. 4 market for Idaho ag exports, totaled \$63 million, up 36 percent.

In the case of Vietnam, the value of Idaho ag product exports skyrocketed 677 percent, to \$14 million.

“The U.S. trade deal with Japan continues to benefit Idaho’s agricultural exports,” Robison said. And, “China continues to ramp up purchases of agricultural commodities, including corn and other grains, most likely contributing to Idaho’s \$25 million increase in cereals exports” last year.

Canada, which purchased \$258 million worth of ag exports from Idaho in 2020, a 2 percent increase over 2019, remained the top destination for Idaho agricultural exports.

In a recent column, American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall said that, according to USDA, the overall outlook for U.S. agricultural exports for the current fiscal year is bright.

“We are nearly halfway through the current fiscal year and the latest USDA trade outlook, released last month, predicts a record \$157 billion in U.S. agricultural exports – that’s a \$21 billion increase from the previous fiscal year,” Duvall wrote March 10. “This is some much-needed good news for farmers and ranchers and a hopeful sign of better days ahead.”

The Census Bureau data is released quarterly and is based on what state a commodity is exported from, so it doesn’t capture all of Idaho’s farm product exports. For example, it doesn’t capture the wheat from Idaho that is exported out of Portland.

But it does show trends and from a percentage standpoint, matches closely with USDA data that is released annually. The USDA data captures more of the state’s farm exports but it is not as timely as the Census Bureau data.

Both sets of data show that Idaho’s agricultural exports are on the rise.

The USDA Idaho ag export data for 2020 will be released this fall. ■



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Photo by Ken Bevis

Wildlife piles are slash piles that are purpose-built for wildlife habitat and will not be burned.



‘Habitat’ piles can benefit wildlife

By Chris Schnepf
University of Idaho

When most Idaho forest owners think of piles, they think of something that needs to be burned. Piling and burning slash is one of the

most common methods of reducing fire hazard from slash created during a timber harvest.

But if you talk to a forest owner back east about slash piles, the first thing they think of may be wildlife habitat. That is because concern about fire risk is not as acute there. In



Photo by Chris Schnepf

Wildlife piles seek to emulate natural habitat elements, such as these jack-strawed logs.

the eastern U.S., slash piles are one of the more common practices landowners use to benefit wildlife.

But this type of habitat can be useful to western wildlife species, too. Our University of Idaho Extension publication on managing organic debris and slash (downloadable at <https://www.extension.uidaho.edu/publishing/pdf/PNW/PNW0609.pdf>) describes how jack-strawed large organic debris is helpful for a variety of insects, small mammals, and the larger carnivores such as martens, fishers and bears, which prey on them.

Many people would look at piles constructed for this purpose and call them slash piles – they would not be wrong. But it may be more helpful to describe piles that are purpose-built for wildlife habitat by another name – “wildlife piles” or “habitat piles.”

The primary purpose of a slash pile is to

create something that will burn cleanly and quickly, to reduce the fire risk associated with the leftovers from a logging operation that create the greatest fire risk – materials less than 3” in diameter.

Standard slash piles have some wildlife value, but purpose-built wildlife piles are constructed differently, to maximize their habitat value.

There is no absolute recipe, but Kevin Bevis, a wildlife biologist with the Washington Department of Natural Resources, recommends starting on the bottom with some larger pieces of logs laid perpendicular to each other, 3-5 layers deep, with gaps between logs, then topping this off with an 18-inch thick layer of smaller diameter material (see <https://sflonews.wordpress.com/2017/02/13/pile-it-on-habitat-piles-for-wildlife/> for more details).

Ultimately, the goal is a pile that is at least 12-15 feet in diameter and 6-8 feet

high.

You might want to create some piles with larger openings at the bottom to create a “tunnel” or den site, at least 6 feet deep into the lowest portions of the pile.

Make the opening about 24” across (but not too visible) for larger animals. You can also take advantage of stumps or larger rocks on the site for larger bottom openings.

Just because a pile has been built for wildlife does not mean it cannot be a fire hazard. Wildlife piles as described here use mostly larger diameter wood (less than 3”) than the primary material assessed in a slash hazard assessment.

You could make these piles using nothing but material larger than 3” in diameter. Regardless, if you create these piles in conjunction with a timber harvest, be sure to communicate with your local Idaho Department of Lands fire warden to make



Photo by Ken Bevis

Wildlife piles are slash piles that are purpose-built for wildlife habitat and will not be burned.

sure you are not running afoul of Idaho slash treatment laws by not burning these piles.

There may also be ways to reduce slash hazard associated with wildlife piles. For example, you could place them away from trees and isolate these piles from other slash in the unit. Also avoid building wildlife piles within 100 feet of structures, to avoid increasing fire risk to those structures.

Be aware of potential insect hazards when creating wildlife piles. If stemwood used in these piles is sufficiently green in the spring, bark beetles that breed in downed green trees may use it to complete their development.

The primary concern is with stemwood from recently living ponderosa pine, lodgepole pine and Douglas-fir. Grand fir and spruce can also be an issue.

For more information on what type of material is safe to use and when, see the UI Extension publication on organic debris referenced earlier. A few rules of thumb regarding bark beetles that breed in downed trees:

- Material smaller than 3 inches in

diameter is almost never a bark beetle hazard. Occasionally Ips beetles or minor bark beetles will attack smaller diameter materials, but the material usually dries out, starving the larvae before they develop fully.

- Logs from some tree species are rarely, if ever, a bark beetle hazard. Some bark beetle species breed in fallen cedar and hemlock, but they do not emerge to attack standing green trees. Logs from broadleaf species such as cottonwood or birch do not present bark beetle hazards here either.

- Trees dead longer than one year are not a bark beetle hazard. Even if those trees were at one time infested with bark beetles, the offspring have already left. You may find insects in them that are superficially similar to bark beetles, but they are not usually insects that kill trees. The same goes with large wood boring insects (commonly found working in dead trees or firewood). These insects rarely kill trees.

Hazard from bark beetles also depends on the size and species of the standing trees in the immediate area. For example, you may have fallen Douglas-fir of appro-

priate size and freshness for Douglas-fir beetles, but if the standing green trees in the immediate area are all too small or of a different species (say ponderosa pine), you do not have a potential bark beetle problem.

Most forest owners like seeing wildlife on their property, or at least knowing wildlife are there, even if they don't get to see them (the case with many nocturnal species).

Providing wildlife piles may provide tree benefits (e.g., habitat for squirrels that help spread mycorrhizal fungi). But they could also have issues. For example, will providing more habitat to snowshoe hares increase tree seedling damage?

As with most forest management strategies, there are potential trade-offs to consider, but for landowners who put a premium on vertebrate critters, wildlife piles are worth exploring.

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

Word Search Answers

Springtime

S	P	K	C	I	L	O	R	F	A	R	M	E	R	L	W
P	U	D	D	L	E	S	H	M	T	S	E	N	A	B	H
L	M	N	E	W	Z	Z	W	M	O	O	L	B	I	U	M
O	C	F	S	W	E	A	T	H	E	R	T	F	N	D	C
W	L	E	S	H	O	W	E	R	S	A	L	G	D	S	B
S	E	H	P	K	I	P	L	E	R	W	I	N	D	Y	L
D	A	P	R	I	L	N	W	F	W	A	R	M	E	R	J
S	N	W	O	F	B	M	E	R	P	K	N	D	R	L	F
L	P	N	U	R	U	P	C	E	L	E	B	R	A	T	E
T	L	R	T	I	S	N	T	S	Z	N	T	I	R	H	P
P	A	S	I	E	G	N	A	H	C	B	S	Z	P	A	N
M	N	T	H	N	E	D	R	A	G	T	P	Z	H	W	C
W	T	H	K	D	G	Z	S	R	E	W	O	L	F	L	W
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Aquifer recharge paying dividends for E. Idaho canal companies

By John O'Connell

Intermountain Farm and Ranch

An association of nine Eastern Idaho canal companies should benefit greatly during the upcoming irrigation season from excess surface water shareholders stored in the aquifer during the past water year.

The canal companies collaborate on a private managed aquifer recharge program, which entails running surplus surface water through unlined canals to seep into the aquifer, or diverting it into spill basins or injection wells.

The surface water is slower to flow through the system once it's converted into groundwater and also helps offset declining groundwater levels due to heavy well irrigation.

Steve Howser, general manager of the Aberdeen-Springfield Canal Co., estimates the nine companies recharged a combined 70,000-acre-feet of water during the water year that ended on Oct. 1.

He estimates his canal company, which has its own recharge area called the Hilton Spillway, recharged about 40,000 acre-feet of the total. An acre-foot is the amount of water needed to flood an acre of land a foot deep in water.

Howser explained the state had flood-control releases from the Upper Snake reservoir system this spring. Therefore, special natural flow water rights held by the companies for recharge were in priority.

Most of Howser's shareholders hold both groundwater and surface water rights and were ordered to reduce their well irrigation under the terms of a 2015 settlement between junior groundwater users and senior water rights holders with the Surface Water Coalition.

Members of the coalition argued spring flows into the Snake River that fed their



Photo by Sean Ellis

Aquifer recharge efforts are paying dividends for East Idaho canal companies and the irrigators that depend on them.

longstanding surface water rights were in decline due to irrigation involving more recent groundwater rights.

Howser explained about half of the volume his canal company recharged during the past water year will be used to help his shareholders mitigate for their groundwater use, in compliance with the settlement. The other half will be used to help members of the Bingham Groundwater District and American Falls groundwater District mitigate for the settlement.

Howser also recharged a few thousand acre-feet of water for the Idaho Water Resource Board. Furthermore, his company supplied 5,000 acre-feet to the Water District 1 Supplemental Rental Pool.

During the recent fall meeting of the Idaho Water Supply Committee, hosted via Zoom, Idaho Department of Water Resources hydrologist Mike McVay also provided an update on the state's public

recharge program.

The public program utilizes a water right that remains in priority throughout the winter, when participating canal systems aren't in use, and when spring flood-control flows are available.

The state also has infrastructure specifically built for conducting recharge, with the goal of reversing a trend of declining groundwater levels.

During the past water year, the state's public program recharged an estimated 453,323 acre-feet. The aquifer has made significant gains since the start of the program.

McVay said the aquifer gained roughly 2.2 million acre-feet from the spring of 2015 through the spring of 2020, as measured by 269 wells across the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer.

Just in the winter of 2019 and 2020, the aquifer gained an estimated 350,000 acre-feet of water. ■



Photo by Sean Ellis

Boise restaurateur Dave Krick, foreground, and Nick Baltes, a senior manager at one of the restaurants Krick owns, explain how their urban worm farm works. Food waste from the three restaurants Krick owns in downtown Boise is fed to the red wiggler worms, which consume the food and turn it into worm castings, which are collected and sold as organic fertilizer to gardeners at farmers markets.

Farming worms in downtown Boise

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE – A restaurateur in downtown Boise has been “farming” worms for 16 years as a way to reduce food waste.

Urban Worm, established in 2005 and located in a basement in the heart of downtown Boise, feeds food waste to thousands of red wiggler worms, which turn the waste into worm castings that are sold at farmers markets as organic fertilizer to

home gardeners.

The food waste comes from Bittercreek Alehouse, Diablo and Sons and Red Feather Lounge, three eateries owned by Dave Krick.

The worms, which are housed in two

bins that are each eight feet long, four feet wide, and two feet deep, are fed vegetable scraps and other produce waste, as well as spent grains from a pilot beer brewery. They consume the waste and turn it into worm castings.

“We’re farming worms,” Krick says. “It’s like livestock; we’re feeding them food waste and they’re eating it and” turning it into a product.

Over the course of the week, the food waste is collected from the eateries and placed in a giant trash bin. It is then run through a special machine that mulches the food with water to make a type of food waste slushy. The slushy then goes into a dehydrator, which shoots out confetti food particles that are ready to be digested by the worms.

The food is put into the bins, which contain thousands of worms each and are set up as a flow-through system. The worms are fed from the top of the bins and the castings are harvested off the bottom of the bins, which have screens on a roller-blade system that allows the castings to be shaved off before the screens are rolled back into place.

“We just put the food waste right on top and let the worms go to town on it,” says Nick Baltes, one of the restaurants’ senior managers who oversees the worm farm. “Worm casting compost is one of the best you can get out there and it’s highly prized among gardeners.”

As much as 200 pounds a week of worm castings can be produced in the bins, which are kept in the basement below the three eateries, which are located on 8th Street in downtown Boise.

The bins were custom-made and each one is filled with thousands of red wigglers, which are a type of earthworm commonly used in composting. The worms’ only mission in life is to eat and they do that well, Baltes says.

“They’re just eaters,” he says. “They eat and eat and eat and excrete and excrete and excrete. That is literally all that they do.”

Several of the restaurants’ employees over the years have been responsible for maintaining the worm farm and one actually wrote a 70-page manual on how to run the operation.



Photo by Sean Ellis

Red wiggler worms hard at work consuming food waste in a basement in downtown Boise. The worms turn the food into worm castings, which are sold as organic fertilizer at farmers markets.

While the worm castings are sold, the worm farm is not a money-making operation, Krick says. The main goal behind the worm farm is to be ecologically responsible by reducing the amount of food waste heading to the landfill.

“We have joked over the years that we don’t know why we’re doing this,” he says. “We do it because it’s the right thing to do.”

For the amount of work put into the worm farm and the amount of food waste that is saved from going to the landfill, the operation is probably not doing a huge world of good in the grand scheme of things, Krick says.

“But it’s just a good example of what we could do,” he says. “We feel really good about it, our staff feels really good about it,

we know that we’re trying to do the right thing and so that keeps us going.”

Before COVID-19 hit, Krick said, the restaurants also hosted tours for local schools and used the worm composting operation as a tool to teach students about soil diversity and the importance of recycling food waste.

He said the restaurants also took the opportunity to feed the kids lunch while teaching them about where their food really comes from “and how we complete that cycle by returning the waste back to the farmer, or gardener.”

“This was never a planned part of our (worm) composting operation, but it’s probably the biggest motivator to continue to invest in our system,” Krick said. ■

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