

GEM STATE **Producer** Idaho Farm Bureau.

January 2024 • Volume 28 Issue 1



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Ag Exports, 3**

**Idaho Farm
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Awards, 12**

**New U of I
Entomologist,
19**



Something for everyone at the 2024 American Farm Bureau convention

I'm excited for the lineup at the 2024 American Farm Bureau Convention as we explore New Frontiers together in Salt Lake City this Jan. 19-24.

The convention has something for everyone.

Our general sessions will shine a spotlight on all the great work across Farm Bureau and celebrate the achievements of the next generation of leaders and entrepreneurs from events

like the Ag Innovation Challenge to Young Farmer & Rancher competitions.

Each general session will also feature inspiring keynotes that will help us look to the future.

On Sunday afternoon, we'll hear from global futurist and best-selling author Jack Uldrich.

While Uldrich can't predict the future for our

See **DUVALL**, page 6

The President's Desk

By Bryan Searle

President, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



Pushing forward, with help from family, friends

Life has a way of challenging everyone, even the toughest and most talented among us. Sometimes, those crises that life throws at us can shake us to our very core.

During those times, sometimes all we can do is to keep pushing forward and resolve to find a way through.

It also helps to surround ourselves with a support group of friends and family who will stand with and encourage us as much as possible.

That was one of the main messages conveyed during Idaho Farm Bureau Federation's 84th annual meeting, which was held in Boise Dec. 4-7.

"Never give up. Never stop pushing," Olympic gold medalist Rulon Gardner told IFBF members during the conference. "Sometimes in life, things happen. You have to prepare for them and do your best."

He should know.

See **SEARLE**, page 7

Inside Farm Bureau

By Zak Miller

CEO, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



Intention

Early in my professional career, a wise supervisor taught me a valuable lesson. During a team meeting, a few of us expressed concern about a directive we felt was unfair.

In response, he made a simple but powerful remark. He asked us to consider the intention behind what we were asked before finding fault from our perspective. This was a profound request, and it essentially meant that we should zoom out before zooming in on the issue.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines intention as a determination to act in a certain way.

Because human interaction is complex and nuanced, it is challenging to understand another's goals on a good day. Without understanding the intentions first, it can be darn near impossible.

The lessons of intention were taught to me earlier in life and have been reinforced continually in many subtle ways. A ready example

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Idaho Farm Bureau.

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Photo by Sean Ellis

Wheat is harvested in a field near Ririe in 2022. Idaho set a record for total ag export value in 2022, according to USDA data.

Idaho sets another record for ag export value

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – Idaho set a record for total value of agricultural exports in 2022, according to USDA data released in late October. It was the third straight year the state set a record in that category.

According to a separate set of data released by the U.S. Census Bureau in early November, the state was on pace through the first nine months of 2023 to set another record for total ag export value.

According to the USDA data, \$2.89 billion worth of agricultural products from Idaho were exported to other countries in 2022. That was up 12 percent from the 2021 record of \$2.57 billion and 28 percent more than the \$2.26 billion total in 2020, which was also a record at the time.

“The monetary value of Idaho’s 2022 agricultural exports increased by 12.3 percent, outpacing the overall U.S. increase of 10.4 percent,” said Doug Robison, the Idaho president of AgWest Farm Credit. “Idaho’s export gains also outpaced the other Northwest states by a considerable margin.”

The Census Bureau data is released monthly 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

See RECORD, page 11

COVER: American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall, center, addresses Idaho Farm Bureau Federation members Dec. 6 during IFBF’s 84th annual meeting. Joining him on stage during a “fireside chat” are IFBF President Bryan Searle, left, and Braden Jensen, IFBF’s director of government affairs. Idaho Farm Bureau Federation photo



Photo by Jim Parker

Depredation from elk, deer and beaver has been a major concern for farmers and ranchers in Bear Lake County for many years. About 50 Bear Lake County farmers and ranchers recently met with Idaho Department of Fish and Game employees to discuss the issue.

Farmers, ranchers discuss depredation with fish and game

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

MONTPELIER – Dozens of Bear Lake County farmers and ranchers had a direct and frank discussion with Idaho Department of Fish and Game employees Nov. 27 about wildlife depredation occurring in the region.

About 50 people, almost all of them farmers and ranchers, attended the meeting, which was organized by Bear Lake County Farm Bureau and included several IDFG regional representatives.

Damage to farms and ranches by elk, deer and beavers has been

an ongoing problem for years in the county, said rancher Albert Johnson, president of Bear Lake County Farm Bureau.

While sportsmen have offered input to fish and game on wildlife issues in the region, farmers and ranchers here feel their voices and concerns haven't been heard as much and that's what led to the meeting, Johnson said.

"Farmers and ranchers don't have a voice, it seems, equal to the amount of depredation they've sustained and the resources they've put into wildlife," he said. "We felt farmers and



Photo by Sean Ellis

Regional representatives of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game discuss wildlife depredation issues with about 50 farmers and ranchers in Montpelier Nov. 27. Bear Lake County Farm Bureau President Albert Johnson, left, moderated the discussion.

“These are challenging issues and sometimes we can’t 100 percent solve it. It’s hard on you guys. We recognize that.”

- Zach Lockyer, IDFG regional wildlife populations manager

other landowners needed to have a direct contact voice with fish and game.”

During the meeting, fish and game employees had a fluid, back-and-forth conversation with landowners about depredation problems in the region.

“There was communication that went both ways,” Johnson said. “There were a lot of gaps ... that were closed.”

For example, he said, a lot of farmers and ranchers in that region didn’t know about certain opportunities available for addressing problems caused by beaver. And, at the suggestion of landowners, he said, fish and game officials realized some things they can potentially do preemptively to try to control wildlife depredation problems before they get out of hand.

Johnson said people representing every part of the valley ended up participating in the meeting.

“I thought it was a pretty profitable session,” he said. “We received a lot of feedback from ranchers, a lot of phone calls after the meeting thanking us for that opportunity.”

During the meeting, fish and game employees went over the different resources available to landowners to help them address wildlife depredation issues. For example, there are special hunts that can be held in certain areas experiencing significant depredation. That includes landowner permission hunts and special depredation hunts.

If all else fails, landowners can apply for reimbursement for depredation-related losses through a claims process.

“These are challenging issues and sometimes we can’t 100 percent solve it,” said Zach Lockyer, IDFG’s regional wildlife populations manager. “It’s hard on you guys. We recognize that. That’s where the claims process comes in, to reimburse you for your losses.”

Beaver are not covered under that claims program, however, and fish and game employees described resources available to landowners to address problems caused by beaver.

“There is quite a problem with beavers,

not only in the canyon but in the meadows as well,” Johnson said.

“Beavers are kind of the bane of my existence right now,” said Kolby White, a senior conservation officer with IDFG. “As soon as you (see) there are beavers starting to do something, let me know and I can do something about it.”

Asked about wolves, Lockyer said although there have been sightings in the area, the predators are not established in the region.

“We’re under the mindset of when, not if, they get here,” he said. “We’re set up to not allow a high volume...of wolves to get established here.”

Fish and game employees told meeting participants they have received the message about the wildlife depredation issues in the area and will do what they can to help landowners address them.

“We do feel your guys’ pain and suffering when you are going through something,” said White.

Lockyer told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation later he felt good about how the meeting went.

“It was a good opportunity for us to engage with a group that we don’t get to sit down with as often,” he said. “There were good questions, good dialogue and I hope we get future opportunities to engage with that group again.” ■

Continued from page 2

farms and ranches, he can help us prepare for it.

He will challenge us to look beyond what we can see today and anticipate what's around the corner for agriculture so that we can succeed together.

We'll close out our annual convention hearing from best-selling author and former associate athletic director of student counseling at the University of Michigan, Greg Harden.

Over his career, he has counseled more than 400 student athletes who went on to careers in professional sports. You may have heard of a few of his former students, such as Tom Brady, Michael Phelps and Desmond Howard.

I am sure his message about coaching and mentorship will be timely for all of us and inspire us as we head into a new year.

But you won't have to wait for the general sessions to explore engaging content and enjoy fellowship across the Farm Bureau family at the annual convention.

From farm tours to the Trade Show Experience, activities will already be in full swing for all on Saturday.

The national Program and Education Committee will be hosting their Communicate, Collaborate, and Influence (CCI) training again this year. The entire program is open to any Farm Bureau

member interested in connecting with consumers and sharing agriculture's story more broadly.

They'll be kicking things off Saturday afternoon with an inspiring message from the Cowboy Coach, Jon Anderson, who will share how faith and family has carried him through, both on the farm and beyond.

The Trade Show Experience will continue to be a busy hub all weekend long, so you'll want to plan to spend extra time checking out all the exciting events there this year.

We've got a full lineup planned at the Cultivation Center Stage. To name a few folks you will see there ... Tara Vander Dussen and Natalie Kovarik will be back with a live recording of their popular Discover Ag podcast.

Amanda Nigg, better known as the FarmFitMomma, will join us to talk about the connection between mental health and physical wellbeing, and her wellness journey in the agriculture community.

We've also got a great lineup of panels and fireside chats planned, covering topics from engaging Gen Z consumers to strengthening links across the supply chain.

You also won't want to miss the live Final Four competitions for the Ag Innovation Challenge and the YF&R Discussion Meet.

If you notice a few barks when you're walking around the Trade Show, you don't need to have your hearing checked. We're welcoming back the always popular and entertaining Purina Show Dogs.

They're a favorite for my grandkids for sure! These show dogs will join us on Saturday to help celebrate the important role our four-legged friends play on the farm.

Then, at our general session main stage, one top farm dog will be named the new Farm Dog of the Year. In the meantime, you can vote for the People's Choice Pup on our social media channels.

Now, I've only been able to give a snapshot of all we've got in store at the 2024 American Farm Bureau Convention.

You can be sure we'll have all our hallmark Farm Bureau events—from the Sunrise Service hosted by the Women's Leadership Committee to the Foundation Flapjack Fundraiser.

Plus, our team of policy experts and economists will provide insights on the policies and perspectives affecting your farms, ranches and agribusinesses for the next year and beyond with informative and engaging workshops throughout the weekend.

I hope you'll visit the event website – annualconvention.fb.org – to learn more about these events and everything else we have planned for you as we get ready to explore new frontiers in Salt Lake City! ■

MILLER

Continued from page 2

of intention to me is the relationship between horse and rider.

In my experience, a horse that trusts its rider will always give more effort and heart than a horse that reacts out of fear of its rider.

When a rider approaches a horse intending to work together as a team, the horse learns that it doesn't need to understand the reason behind all the asks the rider may make of it.

Exceptional horses trust their riders with their health and safety. This trust comes from the rider clearly outlining their intention for the horse and rider to achieve a task while ensuring the horse's safety in the process.

Horses that do not understand that their rider's intentions are

'It is fascinating how we can swiftly comprehend the intentions of government representatives by observing their actions.'

good tend to offer less effort because they feel the need to conserve energy to protect themselves from danger due to their lack of trust in their rider's intentions.

Are our human relationships that different?

It is fascinating how we can swiftly comprehend the intentions of government representatives by observing their actions.

Some appear to have all the answers already prepared, and it seems they intend to impose their own beliefs and ideologies on all citizens, expecting them to comply without question.

If anyone opposes their ideas or tactics, these individuals resort to bullying, demeaning, and dictating demands to their peers and constituents.

Others' intentions are to be in the spotlight and they will do all in their power to elbow and jostle to the front of every camera and reporter possible. These individuals find fault easily both in the efforts of legislation and even in the personality of their rivals.

SEARLE

Continued from page 2

Following his improbable gold medal victory over possible the greatest wrestler of all time – Russian Aleksandr Karelin – during the 2000 Olympics, Gardner came out on the surviving side of two incidents that nearly cost him his life.

[See page 8 for a story about the convention and Gardner's near-fatal accidents.]

Idaho Farm Bureau members also heard from other speakers during the conference about the importance of determination during crisis times, when obstacles seem insurmountable.

One of the main pieces of advice they gave was the importance of having a superior support system during those times.

While that will mean different things to each person, the Farm Bureau family itself can serve as a support system during such trying times.

My family benefited greatly from support from fellow Farm Bureau members when we almost lost a son who was gravely injured after getting t-boned in his vehicle at an intersection back in 2014.

Though life-flighted to the hospital and given no chance of living by doctors, he miraculously is here today.

That son, Ray, now serves as state chairman of IFBF's Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee, and Ray himself, during our organization's recent meeting, encouraged others to keep pushing when things seem nearly impossible.

"I had a lot of support. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to do it," he said during the conference.

The Farm Bureau family is full of people from many different backgrounds and with many different talents and it was wonderful to see those on full display during our recent annual meeting.

For the first time, a Young Farmers and Ranchers conference was held in conjunction with IFBF's annual meeting.

These individuals quickly say what is wrong but often struggle to offer real solutions in their perpetual campaign speeches.

Still others offer intentions to serve their constituents and the people of Idaho. They may not always be right, they may not always agree, and they may not even be likable. However, these are the ones that will at least listen and try to understand.

These are the ones I deeply respect because they are the ones who will do the hard work to do the right thing regardless of the noise and insults. These people have intentions that are pure enough to be trusted even when they occasionally fail.

May we all watch the antics and efforts of our elected officials. We can all do our part to consider their intentions. ■

Young producers – those between the ages of 18 and 35 – were encouraged to learn from more experienced mentors who are Farm Bureau members.

The organization has plenty of men and women who have been there and done that and can offer sound personal and professional advice that is based on real-life experience.

YF&R members were also encouraged to take advantage of the many opportunities the Farm Bureau organization offers people to become better educated and to serve.

The centerpiece of the IFBF annual meeting, of course, is to develop policies that support our state and its farmers and ranchers.

Voting delegates from all the state's county Farm Bureau organizations come together to debate and vote on proposed policies that have been devel-

oped at the grassroots level by actual agricultural producers.

Those proposed policies that pass the scrutiny of the delegate body are added to the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation policy book.

This book contains our organization's marching orders and serves as our guide during Idaho's legislative process and throughout the year.

The reason Farm Bureau is so strong is because we are an organization that operates from the ground up. "From the Ground Up," by the way, was the theme of the YF&R part of the conference this year.

During our recent annual meeting, we were blessed to welcome Zippy Duvall, a good friend and president of American Farm Bureau Federation.

It was great to have our old friend in Idaho again and he made a point of letting members know that the true power of this organization lies in the county Farm Bureaus. ■

'The reason Farm Bureau is so strong is because we are an organization that operates from the ground up.'

Gold medalist Rulon Gardner speaks at Farm Bureau convention

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE – Olympic gold medalist Rulon Gardner, who did the seemingly impossible during the 2000 Olympics, was a keynote speaker during Idaho Farm Bureau Federation's 84th annual meeting.

"There are no better people in this world than farmers," Gardner said during the convention, which attracted 450 Farm Bureau members from around the state. "This is probably the best time I've ever had speaking at a convention."

Gardner, who grew up on a Wyoming dairy farm, achieved instant fame when he defeated Greco-Roman wrestling legend Aleksandr Karelin in the gold medal match during the Sydney Olympics.

Karelin, known as the Russian Bear, was a living legend, having already won three Olympic and nine world championship gold medals.

Before the match, Karelin had not lost in 13 years and no one had even scored a point on him in the past seven years of international competition. He was considered a lock for the gold medal in 2000 and Gardner's win is considered one of the greatest upsets in Olympic history.

During the Farm Bureau convention, Gardner gave a spellbinding and often-times humorous recount of his life and the events leading up to his match with Karelin.

Gardner credited his time spent on the family farm for his determination and work ethic – "I didn't fear hard work. My



Olympic wrestling gold medalist Rulon Gardner was a keynote speaker during Idaho Farm Bureau Federation's 84th annual meeting which was held Dec. 4-7 in Boise. Idaho Farm Bureau Federation photos

"Never give up. Never stop pushing. Sometimes in life, things happen. You have to prepare for them and do your best."

- Rulon Gardner, Olympic Gold Medalist

life was spent working hard on the farm" – and he encouraged people to continue to persevere and never give up.

Following his Olympic victory, Gardner later survived two potentially fatal incidents, one involving a snowmobile and the other a plane crash.

"Never give up. Never stop pushing," Gardner told Idaho Farm Bureau members. "Sometimes in life, things happen. You have to prepare for them and do your best."

His advice fit well into the overall theme of the Farm Bureau convention, which was held Dec. 4-7 in Boise and focused a lot on encouraging people to keep pushing, even when times are tough and obstacles seem insurmountable.

Bingham County farmer Ray Searle, chairman of IFBF's Young Farmers and Ranchers organization, recounted the time his vehicle was t-boned at an intersection by another vehicle and he was transported by helicopter to a hospital and then given no chance to live.

After 20 surgeries and a lot of rehab, he did recover and he credited his turnaround to the family and friends who stood by him and supported him.

"I had a lot of support. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to do it," Searle said.

Fighting back emotions, IFBF President Bryan Searle, Ray's father, said, "Moral of the story is, you can do hard things. I don't care who you are. You can do hard things. It's a story about a miracle."

Bryan Searle also told convention participants that Farm Bureau is a strong organization with a lot of tools that can help agricultural producers prepare for tough times and succeed in their professional and personal lives.

Experienced farmers and ranchers are one of those tools and can act as mentors for younger agricultural producers, he said.

"Pick out mentors you can learn from, talk to them, ask them questions, learn from their experience," Bryan Searle said.

For the first time, a Young Farmers and

Ranchers convention was held in conjunction with the IFBF annual meeting.

That event included young producers from the ages of 18 to 35 and they were encouraged to take full advantage of the educational and networking opportunities offered by Idaho Farm Bureau Federation, the state's largest general farm organization, which represents about 11,000 farmers and ranchers around Idaho.

"Take advantage of the opportunities YF&R provides you to be a leader because you can be a good leader," Bryan Searle told YF&R conference participants.

Nathan Ogden, who was the keynote speaker during the YF&R part of the convention, told participants they can do the seemingly improbable if they dig in and commit to achieving it.

Ogden, a paraplegic who broke his neck during a skiing accident, said people need to first figure out what their purpose is and then surround themselves with a support system, quit making excuses and push themselves to achieve their goals.

Supporting others and in turn being supported by them is the key, he said.

"That's what the whole point of this Farm Bureau community is, to help each other," Ogden said. "I feel sorry for the ones that aren't part of this Farm Bureau organization because they don't have this kind of support."

American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall visited Idaho to attend the IFBF conference and told members he is happiest when he's out amongst the Farm Bureau family.

"The thing I enjoy the most is getting out to the states and meeting the grassroots," he said. "It is humbling, it's an honor and privilege to be with you."

Duvall also said that while many challenges face the nation's farmers and ranchers, "American agriculture is in a really good position ... to move into the future and take on the new frontiers. The rest of the world is in a lot worse shape in agriculture."

The main purpose of the annual IFBF meeting is to pass policy that supports the state's agricultural industry. Voting delegates from all of Idaho's county Farm Bureau organizations voted on proposed



TOP: Delegates from all of Idaho Farm Bureau Federation's county Farm Bureau organizations discussed policy proposals during IFBF's annual meeting, which was held Dec. 4-7 in Boise.
ABOVE: Idaho Farm Bureau Federation county Farm Bureau presidents Val Hammond (Fremont) and Shaun Blaser (Madison) discuss an issue during IFBF's 84th annual meeting.

policies during the convention's House of Delegates session.

Delegates, who are all farmers or ranchers, discussed, debated and voted on a wide array of proposed policies, everything from water to wolves to grizzly bears, dams, crop and livestock issues, education, the state's open range law and taxes.

The policies are initiated at the county Farm Bureau level, discussed and vetted

there, and then discussed, debated and voted on during the House of Delegates session.

Policies that pass muster are included in IFBF's policy book, which contains the organization's marching orders throughout the year.

"This is your harvest," IFBF Chief Executive Officer Zak Miller said in reference to the policy portion of the conference.

He also reminded meeting participants that Idaho Farm Bureau exists to empower agriculture. “That is our mandate. That is our job.”

Bryan Searle encouraged members to become or stay involved when it comes to ensuring common-sense laws supporting agriculture are passed and not ones that hinder the industry.

“If we don’t take part and get involved, guess who makes those laws?” he said. The answer: people who may not have the industry’s best interests in mind. “The key is, we have to be involved ... We won’t have an influence if we stay home and complain.”

“Let’s move forward ... and let’s become involved,” Searle said. “It’s critical that we pass sound policy that will keep us in business as we move forward.”

During the conference, Todd Argall, CEO of Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance Co. of Idaho, told participants membership within the organization reached an all-time high of 81,752 in 2023. That was a year-over-year increase of 4 percent.

“Farm Bureau insurance is strong and we’re preparing for the future,” he said, adding that maintaining the strong relationship between IFBF and the insurance company is a major goal. “A



Idaho Farm Bureau Federation voting delegates Dennis Lincoln, right, Patrick Fields, center, and Shane Alder discuss a policy issue during IFBF’s 84th annual meeting.

strong Farm Bureau insurance company leads to a strong Farm Bureau federation and a strong Farm Bureau federation leads to a strong Farm Bureau insurance company.” ■



Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President Bryan Searle, left, receives a Navigator Award from American Farm Bureau Federation Vice President Scott Vanderwal in December. The award is given to state Farm Bureau organizations that meet membership goals. Membership within the IFBF organization reached an all-time high of 81,752 in 2023, a 4 percent increase over 2022.

Continued from page 3

percentage standpoint, matches closely with USDA data that is released annually in the fall.

The USDA data captures more of the state's farm exports but it is not as timely as the Census Bureau data. However, both sets of data match closely when it comes to percentage increased and decreases. Both sets of data show that Idaho's agricultural exports are on the rise and in record territory.

According to the recently released Census Bureau data, Idaho ag export value through the third quarter of 2023 totaled \$893 million, which was 5 percent more than the 2022 total of \$849 million during the same period.

The Idaho record for ag export value, according to the Census Bureau data, is \$1.13 billion, set in 2022.

Much of Idaho's gain in total ag export value in 2022 was achieved due to higher commodity prices. In 2023, prices for many of Idaho's top agricultural commodities are down significantly compared with 2022, which means the 2023 gains are due more to volume increases.

Farm-level dairy prices hit record levels last year and led Idaho's ag export value gains in 2022. In 2023, dairy prices are much lower and it's other ag categories that are leading the gains.

According to the USDA data, a record \$714 million worth of dairy products from Idaho were exported to other nations in 2022.

In 2023, according to the Census Bureau data, Idaho dairy export value is down significantly. But other categories are up substantially.

That includes the processed vegetable category, which includes frozen potato products such as French fries.

The fresh vegetable category, which is largely potatoes, is also up and a lot of that increase is related to the entire Mexico market being open for the first time to fresh U.S. potatoes.

The U.S. Census Bureau data shows Idaho exports to Mexico in the prepared vegetables category, which largely consists of frozen potato products, totaled \$55 million through the first nine months of 2023. That is up 259 percent compared with the same period last year.

Referring to the recent opening of the entire Mexico market to U.S. fresh potatoes, National Potato Council CEO Kam Quarles recently told Idaho potato growers: "The news has been increasingly positive for a market that you just couldn't imagine five years ago would be open to us. It's a great thing for the industry."

"It is a huge market," Idaho Potato Commission CEO Jamey Higham told Idaho potato farmers Nov. 15 in Idaho Falls during the IPC's annual Big Idaho Potato Harvest Meeting. "Mexico, I think, is our best opportunity for growth this year."

Dairy, at \$714 million, was the state's top ag export in terms of value in 2022, according to the USDA data.

Idaho also exported a record \$307 million worth of beef and veal products in 2022, and \$385 million worth of wheat.

A record \$187 million worth of fresh vegetables from Idaho were exported in 2022, as well as a record \$321 million worth of processed vegetables. Both those categories include potatoes.

Idaho exported a record \$161 million worth of feeds and other feed grains last year, as well as \$73 million worth of processed grain products.

The USDA data shows Idaho exported a record \$1.75 billion worth of plant products in 2022 and a record \$1.15 billion worth of animal products.

The Census Bureau data show that through the first nine months of 2023, Canada is the top market for Idaho ag exports. Idaho exported \$288 million worth of ag products to Canada through the third quarter, up 6 percent compared with the same period in 2022.

Mexico through the third quarter of 2023 is the state's No. 2 ag export market (\$186 million, up 54 percent), followed by China (\$83 million, down 14 percent) and Japan (\$51 million, up 15 percent). ■

Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins



Mr. Potatohead had second thoughts about having a facial peel.

Awards presented during IFBF annual meeting

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



TOP: Sen. Jim Guthrie, R-McCammon, addressed Idaho Farm Bureau Federation members during the organization's 84th annual meeting. Guthrie was presented with a Defender of Agriculture award.

MIDDLE: Robert and Linda Rider, center, of Coeur d'Alene were presented with the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President's Cup Award, the organization's highest honor, which goes to a person or individuals who have committed themselves to promoting agriculture. Presenting the award Dec. 6 in Boise are IFBF President Bryan Searle, right, and IFBF Vice President Richard Durrant.

ABOVE: Kevin and Shelby Andrus, who ranch in Lava Hot Springs, received IFBF's Excellence in Agriculture Award, which spotlights young Farm Bureau members.

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation photos

BOISE – Several awards were presented during Idaho Farm Bureau Federation's 84th annual meeting, which was held Dec. 4-7 in Boise.

IFBF's most prestigious award went to Robert and Linda Rider of Coeur d'Alene.

The Riders were presented with the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President's Cup Award, the organization's highest honor, which goes to a person or individuals who have committed themselves to promoting agriculture.

The Riders' ranching operation centers around agritourism and providing the public a little taste of the ranching lifestyle. That includes guided trail rides with dinner, family barn nights, horse-drawn wagon rides, children's birthday parties and other group events.

Rider Ranch began incorporating agritourism into its operation almost 40 years ago, said Lida Rider.

"We're done lots of those (types of events) over lots of years," she said.

"We get people from all over the United States," Rider added. "We get to share a little bit of north Idaho with them and a little bit of what family ranching might look like. They always want to know how you live and what you do, so it's fun to be able to share that with them."

While presenting the award, IFBF President Bryan Searle described the Riders as "dedicated, hard-working servants. We appreciate who you are and what you represent."

They have spent many years involved with IFBF and Kootenai-Shoshone County Farm Bureau.

"I have this passion that people should understand where their food comes from and Farm Bureau has been a great avenue for me to be able to do that," Linda Rider said.

For the first time, IFBF presented Defender of Agriculture awards. They went to Sen. Jim Guthrie, R-McCammon, and Rep. Jason Monks, R-Meridian.

"We are so grateful to them," said IFBF Vice President of Governmental Affairs Russ Hendricks. "When the chips were down, they did not shrink. They really stood up and defended agriculture."

"It should be me thanking you," Guthrie told Farm Bureau members after receiving the award. "Having Farm Bureau support when you're running legislation is incredible. Thank you for everything you do to keep Idaho, Idaho."

"There are very few organizations out there that support conservative values like Idaho Farm Bureau," Monks said. "You guys do such a valuable service. Thank you so much for what you do. We won't be Idaho without you."

Braxton and Jamie Crapo, who farm in Parker, were presented with IFBF's Achiever Award, which recognizes young farmers or ranchers who have excelled in their farming or ranching opera-



LEFT TOP: During its 84th annual meeting, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation presented awards to Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance Co. of Idaho agents. IFBF's Agent Recognition Program is designed to recognize Idaho Farm Bureau insurance agents who do an outstanding job of gaining new associate and regular members, retaining current members, and engaging with county Farm Bureaus to promote the Idaho Farm Bureau organization. The 2023 Agent of the Year award went to Matt Anderson, third from left, Rookie of the Year Award went to Brittney Smith, and Manager of the Year Award went to Ben Rae, second from right. Presenting the awards here are IFBF President Bryan Searle, right, IFBF CEO Zak Miller, left, and Todd Argall, CEO of Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance Co. of Idaho.

LEFT MIDDLE: Cole Lickley, who ranches in Wapello, won Idaho Farm Bureau Federation's annual Discussion Meet, which helps young producers hone their public speaking and problem-solving skills during a competition that is meant to simulate a committee meeting rather than a debate. He is shown here competing in the final round of the event.

LEFT: Rep. Jason Monks, R-Meridian, is presented with an Idaho Farm Bureau Federation Defender of Agriculture award during the organization's 84th annual meeting. Presenting the award are Russ Hendricks, right, IFBF's vice president of governmental affairs, and IFBF President Bryan Searle.

ABOVE: Braxton and Jamie Crapo, who farm in Parker, were presented with IFBF's Achiever Award, which recognizes young farmers or ranchers who have excelled in their farming or ranching operation and honed their leadership abilities. Presenting the award are IFBF President Bryan Searle, right, IFBF Vice President Richard Durrant, second from right, Ray Searle, second from left, chairman of IFBF's Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee, and Mitchell Searle, left, a member of the YF&R Committee.

tion and honed their leadership abilities.

Achiever award contestants are evaluated on a combination of their farming operation's grown and financial progress and their leadership both within Farm Bureau and outside of the organization.

Contestants give a presentation to a panel of judges, who ask them questions.

Kevin and Shelby Andrus, who ranch in Lava Hot Springs, received IFBF's Excellence in Agriculture Award, which spotlights young Farm Bureau members who are agricultural enthusiasts but have not earned a majority of their income from an owned production agriculture enterprise in the past three years.

Competitors for the Excellence award are judged based on their understanding of ag issues as well as their leadership experiences and achievements.

The Achiever and Excellence awards are both part of IFBF's Young Farmers and Ranchers program, which is open to Farm

Bureau members between the ages of 18 and 35.

Cole Lickley, who ranches in Wapello, won IFBF's annual Discussion Meet, which helps young producers hone their public speaking and problem-solving skills during a competition that is meant to simulate a committee meeting rather than a debate.

The contestants, who moderate themselves and engage each other in a cooperative manner, discuss a pre-selected topic and are judged based on constructive criticism, cooperation and communication.

The winners of the Achiever and Excellence awards and the Discussion Meet will compete during the American Farm Bureau Federation annual conference in Salt Lake City in January.

A special Collegiate Discussion Meet, which featured students from University of Idaho, College of Southern Idaho and BYU-Idaho, was won by Rachel Wandell, a student at U of I.

In both Discussion Meets, dozens of people participated at the district and state level. ■



University of Idaho photos

University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences held a groundbreaking ceremony Oct. 14 for the construction of the Meat Science and Innovation Center Honoring Ron Richard.

U of I breaks ground on \$14 million meat science facility

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

MOSCOW, Idaho – Construction is underway on a \$14 million facility that will house University of Idaho's meat science program and provide the space it needs to continue to grow.

Hundreds of people involved in the state's livestock and meat industry attended an Oct. 14 groundbreaking ceremony for the new facility.

"Today's crowd size is a real testament to the excitement for this project," said Michael Parrella, dean of the university's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. "This is a transformational facility."

The 12,750-square foot meat science laboratory will be four

times the size of the current facility that houses the university's meat science program.

It will be called the Meat Science and Innovation Center Honoring Ron Richard in honor of the man who is credited with building the program into what it is today.

The old facility, which is a USDA-inspected facility, was built in the 1960s.

The new one will be a modern meat processing facility designed to allow teaching, research, outreach, service and production to occur simultaneously, said U of I meat scientist Matthew Doumit, a senior associate dean at CALS.

"The facility will be incredible," he said. "What happens inside will be even more special."

He said the center will provide a space for youth, students and the community to learn about the livestock and meat industries and apply that knowledge. In addition, livestock producers in the region can have their animals processed there under USDA inspection, allowing them to direct-market their products.

Employees from all segments of the meat supply chain will train there.

“Cutting edge research in meat quality, safety and product innovation will happen here,” said Doumit, who helped grow the program along with Richard, who passed away five years ago.

Under Richard’s guidance, the program grew to new heights, Doumit said.

“What really became a limiter was the facility,” he said. “Our current facility really has one processing area. You really are limited in what you can do in that facility because of the antiquated design and spacing limitation as well. We’ve really grown the program and certainly outgrown the existing facility.”

The meat science program is currently doing great work at the old facility but the new one will allow that work to expand, Doumit said.

“This new facility will allow teaching, outreach, public service activities, industry workforce training and research to all happen at the same time essentially,” he said. “It’s going to be a magnificent facility.”

“We’re standing here at the intersection of what I fondly refer to as ‘Meat and Potatoes Avenue’ ... and who can’t get excited about meat and potatoes, a fundamental part of Idaho agriculture and our state’s economy.”

- Michael Parrella, dean, U of I College of Agricultural and Life Sciences

The U of I’s meat science program also provides a lot of outreach to industry. For example, since 2015 it has been conducting regular workshops for meat-cutters and meat processing workers employed by WinCo Foods.

“One of the major problems in the industry is finding well-trained people and keeping them engaged in the industry and that’s part of where we come in,” Doumit said.

University of Idaho meat science program graduates have a 100 percent job placement rate, according to the university.

Ron Richard was the face of U of I’s meat science program and Vandal Brands Meats for three decades. His presence has been felt in Idaho’s livestock and meat industry for many years, according to people involved in the industry.

Several of his family members attended the groundbreaking.

“Ron Richard shared a wealth of meat and livestock industry knowledge ... with

literally thousands of people, from youth at livestock shows or meat judging contests, to students, meat processors, livestock producers, community members and colleagues,” Doumit said. “He left a legacy of hard work, professionalism, innovation, mentoring, service, and Vandal pride that will continue to be hallmarks of the Meat Science and Innovation Center Honoring Ron Richard.”

“What I learned about meat science I learned in Ron’s class,” Jerome rancher Laurie Lickley, former president of the Idaho Cattle Association, said during the groundbreaking ceremony.

There are 8,100 cattle operations in Idaho and cattle and calves is the state’s No. 2 agricultural commodity in terms of total farm-gate revenue. Idaho has 2.5 million head of cattle and the state’s cattle and calves sector brought in a record \$1.9 billion in farm-gate revenue in 2022.

“Today’s groundbreaking was merely a vision when I was president of the Idaho Cattle Association back in 2016 that today becomes a reality, and in honor of our dear friend Ron Richard,” Lickley said ... “On behalf of Idaho’s ranching families and the entire beef industry, we say thank you.”

The new facility, which is slated to be completed in fall 2025, is located across from the university’s new Seed Potato Germplasm Laboratory.

“We’re standing here at the intersection of what I fondly refer to as ‘Meat and Potatoes Avenue’ ... and who can’t get excited about meat and potatoes, a fundamental part of Idaho agriculture and our state’s economy,” Parrella said during the groundbreaking ceremony. ■



LEFT: Hundreds of people from across Idaho attended an Oct. 14 groundbreaking ceremony for University of Idaho’s new, \$14 million Meat Science and Innovation Center Honoring Ron Richard.

Enrollment dips in Idaho CREP program

By Steve Stuebner
For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Water savings through reduced groundwater pumping in the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) region are needed more than ever in this rapidly growing area with some of the most productive farmland in the state.

The latest findings on water volume showed the Lake Erie-sized groundwater aquifer has dropped to approximately 4.25 million acre-feet of water, compared to a temporary high of 7.1 million acre-feet of water in 2020, according to the Idaho Department of Water Resources.

The current volume in the ESPA is the second lowest level since the historic low in the drought year of 2016.

Idaho's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), first started in fiscal 2006, is specifically designed to reduce groundwater withdrawals from the ESPA. It's one of many initiatives currently underway to reduce pumping and restore the aquifer to a sustainable level.

Estimates indicate the ESPA is over-drafted by approximately 200,000 acre-feet per year.

CREP is a partnership program between the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the state of Idaho that provides incentive payments to farmers to idle marginal farmland and conserve groundwater.

In Idaho, the state works with the Idaho Department of Water Resources, the Idaho Depart-

ment of Fish and Game, local irrigation districts and conservation districts in a partnership.

The FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance as well as being in charge of advertising and marketing the program. The Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission manages the program, working directly with conservation districts and producers.

If producers enroll in CREP, they must voluntarily idle farmland and stop irrigation use. They're required to plant native grasses and plants in the place of a crop.

CREP enrollment has dropped in recent times since producer contracts had to be renewed in 2021, officials said. At its peak, nearly 20,000 acres of farmland were enrolled in CREP, leading to water savings of about 40,000 acre-feet per year.

Currently, CREP has about 10,225 acres enrolled in the program for a net water savings of 20,450 acre-feet. One acre-foot is the amount of water it takes to flood one acre of land to the depth of one foot.

"A lot of producers felt that 15 years was a long time for their land to be under a CREP contract," said Rob Sharpnack, CREP program manager for the Conservation Commission. "Some people felt that with current high commodity prices, they should be working the land again."

The FSA listened to comments from producers

at the end of the first contract period and reduced the contract period from 15 years to 10 years, Sharpnack noted.

“We haven’t had everyone re-enroll in the program,” he said. “We lost some big contracts, and we’ve had a lot of little ones taking their place.”

The main issue is that farm commodity prices are more attractive to farmers than what they could receive through FSA payments under the CREP program, officials said.

FSA and the state have tried to increase financial incentives for farmers in return for idling marginal farmland. But the commodity prices are still more attractive, officials say.

“It is a great program,” said Bob Turner, executive director of the Idaho Ground Water Appropriators (IGWA). “They have raised their per-acre prices, but the prices that farmers can get for commodities like corn, potatoes and alfalfa are still more attractive.”

IGWA members and groundwater districts across the ESPA are required to reduce groundwater use by a total of 240,000 acre-feet of water per year under a 2015 settlement with the Surface Water Coalition, mediated by then-House Speaker Scott Bedke.

In drought years, groundwater users have not been able to meet the annual target. That has put the settlement agreement on shaky ground. A new agreement between SWC and IGWA is expected to be forthcoming.

In the meantime, ESPA water levels could continue to decline without intervention.

The Idaho Water Resource Board’s ESPA-recharge program – diverting Snake River flows into recharge basins in the winter – has a goal of 250,000 acre-feet of water per year, on average.

In good water years, the board has surpassed that goal. In drought years, it has fallen short.

So all potential ways to reduce demand on the aquifer will help.

Economic value of the ESPA

The ESPA has tremendous significance to the communities of Southern and Eastern Idaho and the state. It is known as a sole-source freshwater aquifer that provides safe drinking water to more than 400,000 residents and 18 cities, irrigation water for more than 1 million acres of farmland, and water for many commercial and industrial businesses – from malt and barley plants to potato processing plants and cheese manufacturing plants.

The ESPA region produces about 21 percent of all goods and services within the state, resulting in an estimated annual value of \$10 billion. Water is the critical element that supports everything.

Turner said IGWA members are looking more at “soft” conversions of groundwater-to-surface water use to keep farmland in production vs. cutting back groundwater use.

“That way you can stay in production and keep your crop mix when there is extra surface water available or storage water available for rent,” he said. “That’s the avenue of choice right now.”

FSA officials and the Conservation Commission, meanwhile, will continue to work on increasing enrollment in CREP.

“The conservation districts are aware of the program and support it,” Sharpnack says. “We occasionally will see a referral from one of them. The groundwater districts all are aware of the program and recommend it to their members. During the first contract period, some groundwater districts offered incentives to their members to enroll in CREP. That has been replaced by the state cost-share payments.”

There are more issues than just commodity prices with CREP enrollment, Sharpnack says.

“Drought has been a big problem for us, making it difficult for us to establish contracts,” he said. “Another problem we had was a population explosion of voles. Voles would destroy some of the native plants, such as the Snake River Wheat Grass, in the CREP fields. Natural controls such as birds of prey, coyotes, foxes, and badgers all helped control the voles and mice while utilizing the CREP fields.”

CREP is a groundwater savings program, he noted. Many landowners who apply cannot demonstrate their groundwater usage on the acres that they hope to enroll for the four of six consecutive years required to enroll in the program, he said.

Another issue: some producers don’t have a clear water right for the land that they wish to enroll in CREP.

How the CREP program works

Federal and state funds are available to producers if they voluntarily enroll in CREP for a 10-year contract. Participants remove irrigated cropland from agricultural production and convert the land to native grasses, trees or other vegetation.

This will reduce irrigation water consumption, improve water quantity and quality in the Snake River and its tributaries, and provide wildlife habitat for terrestrial and aquatic species.

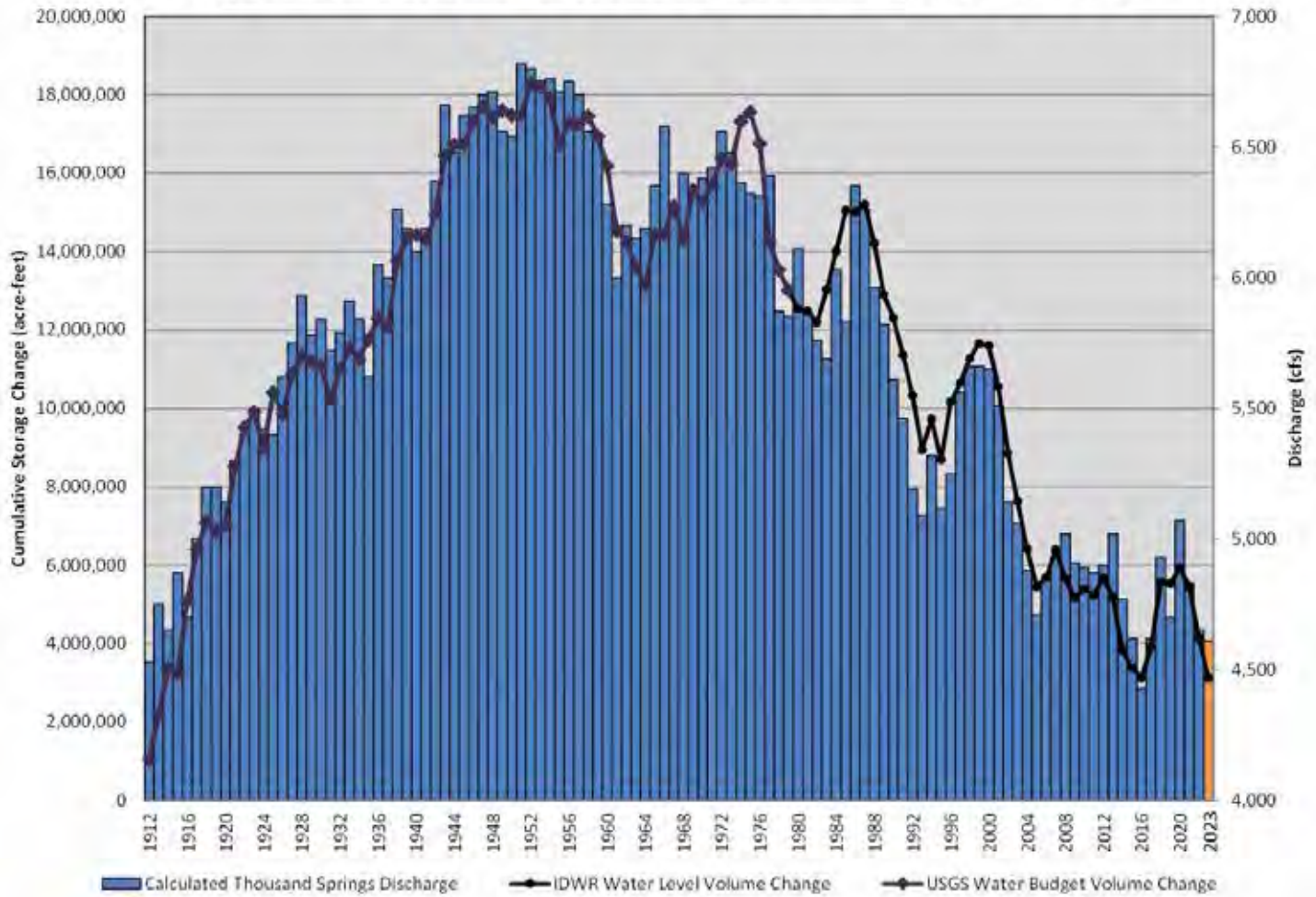
Land enrolled in the program voluntarily curtails the water right during the contract period in exchange for the annual rental payment and becomes active again after the contract period has ended.

The goal for CREP is to enroll up to 50,000 acres of farmland. Producers located in the following counties can sign up for the program: Ada, Bannock, Blaine, Bonneville, Butte, Camas, Cassia, Clark, Custer, Elmore, Fremont, Gooding, Jefferson, Jerome, Lemhi, Lincoln, Madison, Minidoka, Owyhee and Twin Falls.

If 50,000 acres were enrolled, that could lead to the reduction of 100,000 acre-feet of ground water use annually.

The CREP program also has the potential to conserve energy and reduce the amount of agricultural chemicals and sedi-

ESPA Change in Volume of Water and Thousand Springs Discharge



ment entering state waters from agricultural lands, FSA officials said. In addition, the program has the potential to improve aquatic and terrestrial wildlife habitat.

To be eligible cropland must be located in the project area, meet cropping history criteria and be physically capable of being planted in the normal manner to an agricultural commodity, meet minimum irrigation requirements and be physically and legally capable of being irrigated in a normal manner when offered for enrollment.

Applicants must enter into a water use contract with the state.

Participants who enroll their land into CREP must agree to maintain and manage the practice according to an approved conservation plan for the duration of the contract length.

Maintenance includes managing noxious weeds, pests, or other species. The participant agrees to not disturb the acreage during the primary nesting season of April 1—Aug. 1 after stand establishment.

How payments work

Under the Idaho Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer CREP, eligible participants may receive the following payments:

- An annual rental payment is made by the FSA each October.

Rental rates vary by county.

- FSA cost-share payment of up to 50 percent of the eligible cost to install the approved conservation practices on new contracts.
- Idaho provides a 13 percent match of the FSA annual rental payment to landowners.
- On new CREP contracts, Idaho will cost-share \$10 per acre for seed, one time, for conservation planting.

Minidoka County example

A Minidoka County producer elects to enroll 100 acres of irrigated cropland into a 10-year CREP contract. The federal rental rate for the land is \$328 per acre per year.

The Idaho match payment will be 13 percent or \$42.64 per acre per year. The landowner's rental rate payment would be \$370.64 per acre (\$328 + 42.64), for a total annual payment of \$37,064 (\$370.64 x 100 acres).

For more information about the CREP program, contact Rob Sharpnack, CREP program manager, at (208) 944-3783 or rob.sharpnack@swc.idaho.gov. ■

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

University of Idaho hires new entomologist

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

MOSCOW, Idaho – Entomologist Armando Falcon-Brindis is eager to put his extensive background in pollinators, biological pest control agents, ecology and taxonomy to work for the benefit of Idaho's farmers.

Falcon-Brindis, a research associate with University of Kentucky (UK), will join University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences in January as a new assistant professor of entomology and Extension specialist based at the U of I Parma Research and Extension Center.

Falcon-Brindis was educated in Mexico, earning a bachelor's degree in 2009 in animal science, a master's degree in 2014 in environmental science and a doctoral degree in 2019 in natural resources management.

His thesis focused on the ecology of trap-nesting bees and wasps in the Baja California peninsula. He's also published on a host of topics such as the diversity of moths of Mexico, pollination ecology and diversity of wild bees, parasitism of corn earworm, solitary and parasitic wasps and bark and ambrosia beetles.

Furthermore, he's the co-advisor of a doctoral thesis focusing on the taxonomy and ecology of Scoliid wasps of North and Central America.

"I like to understand why we have a certain pool of species in one area. What are those conditions making those species occur in a certain area?" Falcon-Brindis said.

While with UK, he focused much of his research on insect pests affecting hemp production, as well as field crops such as soybeans, corn and wheat. In addition to using chemical pesticides, his approach to integrated pest management includes bio-pesticides and various biological control options.

He can't wait to oversee his own program and make research decisions with U of I. Hops, which are a significant crop raised near Parma, are in the same family as hemp, and Falcon-Brindis is curious to see if some of the same biological control methods he's used for hemp will prove effective in protecting hops.

"It will be great to do some experiments with biological pesticides," Falcon-Brindis said. "There are oils, bacteria and viruses that are currently being used and they can be a good option if you spray them at the right time."

Falcon-Brindis is also intrigued about conducting research in mint, including trials involving pest-resistant mint cultivars, the use of natural enemies of mint pests and biological control options to quash pest populations.

Falcon-Brindis believes his background in native pollinators will be especially useful to growers of crops requiring pollination, such as alfalfa and tree fruit.

Pollinators are in decline and USDA estimates 75% of food crops raised in the U.S. depend upon pollinators. Falcon-Brindis hopes to study ways to slow or reverse the decline of pollinators.

"There's a lot of research that already demonstrates that native



Submitted photo

Entomologist Armando Falcon-Brindis, shown here, will join University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences in January as a new assistant professor of entomology and Extension specialist based at the U of I Parma Research and Extension Center.

bees and native pollinators are way better at pollinating and helping the plants set seeds and fruits compared with honeybees," he said.

Early in his tenure, he intends to evaluate the Treasure Valley's agricultural landscape and surrounding native plant communities to understand the insect species that are present, as well as which ones are associated with specific crops.

He'll be using several statistical tools and new approaches to modeling to break down his data.

He also has big plans for incorporating artificial intelligence into his research to improve efficiency and reduce labor. He'll use drones to aid in the early detection of pests, crop diseases and crop stress.

He also plans to use sensors for early detection of harmful insects, as well as insect tracking and remote insect counting.

He'll be making the move to Idaho with his wife, Gabriela, and his 8-year-old daughter, Alessandra.

"I wish for my research findings to improve people's lives," Falcon-Brindis said. "We're so excited to move over there. I feel joy and excitement to start working and collaborating with colleagues." ■



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Fall reforestation planting

By Chris Schnepf
University of Idaho

In the nearly 40 years I have worked as a forester in northern Idaho, I have heard perennial debates about the relative merits of fall vs. spring tree planting.

In talking to forest owners, the traditional advice has been that fall planting can be risky, so plant in the spring after snow melts and that moisture has drained through the soil to the point of the soil being moist but not sodden. Spring tree planting is still the norm across most forest ownerships in the Inland Northwest.

The two primary reasons given for not planting in the fall have been: Risk of tree seedlings drying out in the fall and essentially dying before spring; and containerized seedlings (“plug seedlings”) not establishing sufficient roots into the soil surrounding the plug and becoming unplanted (“frost heaving”) when cold weather cycles through the planting site.

There can also be timing complications of fall planting regarding site preparation through herbicides and/or broadcast burning.

In recent years, reconsideration of fall planting has been growing. One of the most critical factors affecting whether planted tree seedlings survive and thrive is whether they can get adequate moisture throughout their first growing season.

One of the biggest arguments for fall planting is more ample root growth for the seedling before the drier summer months.

Tree seedlings (and many other northern temperate woody plants) have two seasons of most active root growth: fall and spring. If a seedling enters the summer drought season with one full spring of root growth, and maybe even some root growth from the prior fall, that seedling stands a much better chance of surviving their first summer after planting.

Spring planting often does not allow for a full season of spring root growth. Other advantages of fall planting include getting seedlings established on sites that will likely be inaccessible due to snow in the spring, increased availability of planting labor, and less problematic seedling storage immediately prior to planting.

LEFT: Fall planting can stimulate rapid tree seedling growth when planned and implemented carefully. Kennon McLintock is shown here with a big larch leader. Photos by Chris Schnepf



Fall planting is typically done in very late summer or early fall to get as much fall root growth as possible.

Can you only do fall planting on sites that get decent moisture in the fall? One of the most common concerns about fall planting is that if fall-planted seedlings do not get sufficient fall precipitation, the seedlings actively transpire (conduct photosynthesis) which means they are moving moisture through their leaves.

If roots do not supply sufficient moisture to that process, the seedling could end up drying out and dying, particularly when the seedlings are not properly conditioned for fall planting, the site does not get rain in the fall, or the soils on the planting site do not store water well (e.g., coarse textured soils).

Fall planting will go best if seedlings are grown for that purpose. Typically, that means “hardening off” tree seedlings, by changing watering and light regimens in greenhouse-grown tree seedlings.

Containerized seedlings grown in a greenhouse, as opposed to bare root seedlings grown outdoors in beds, are usually preferred for fall planting because of the ability to manipulate seedling growing conditions.

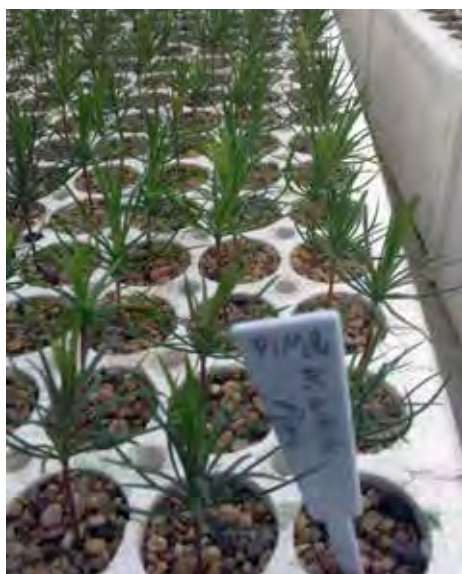
Even for seedling species such as pines, that have determinate growth (meaning they grow a certain amount in the spring and early summer, then naturally harden off mid-summer), some special growing may be needed to support a more robust root system for fall planting.

The amount of frost heaving that can happen may be a bit exaggerated, but it can be reduced by planting seedlings deeply, mulching around them, and planting them early enough to get some fall root growth.

You will need to make some arrangements well ahead of time with the nursery for seedlings if you want to plant in the fall, especially if you want adjustments in how those seedlings are grown to prepare them for fall planting.

That may also mean paying a little more for those seedlings. If you want seedlings purposely grown for fall planting, you should start negotiating a contract with your nursery at least one year ahead of planting.

Currently, most nurseries selling tree



ABOVE: Greenhouse-grown tree seedlings are usually preferred for fall planting. RIGHT: Rigid plastic mesh tubes can reduce seedling browse from deer and elk.

seedlings to Idaho family forest owners are geared up for spring planting, since that is still the norm for most Idaho tree planting. Such nurseries may sell seedlings in the fall, but customers cannot control if or when seedlings will be hardened and ready for fall planting.

Not all nurseries are set up to custom-grow seedlings for fall planting (the University of Idaho Pitkin Nursery does not do this currently).

Planting techniques for the fall are the same as spring. For more information on basic tree planting techniques, go to <https://www.uidaho.edu/cnr/center-for-forest-nursery-and-seedling-research/pitkin/planting> and click on “Plant Your Seedlings Right” on the right side of the page.

There was also an excellent literature review recently on fall planting in *Tree Planters Notes*, an indispensable journal of North American tree planting titled, “Fall Planting in Northern Forests as a Reforestation Option: Rewards, Risks, and Biological Considerations” (downloadable at <https://rngr.net/publications/tpn/64-2/fall-planting-in-northern-forests-as-a-reforestation-option-rewards-risks-and-biological-considerations/?searchterm=fall%20planting>).

Of course, getting the tree seedling in the ground is only one part of successful



reforestation. If deer and elk are likely to be concentrated on the site, consider using tubes or repellents to keep them from munching on your tree seedlings (especially cedar!).

If you are seeing lots of dirt mounds on the planting site, knocking back the pocket gopher population for a few years will likely save tree seedlings.

Finally and most importantly, heavy vegetation competition probably kills more Inland Northwest tree seedlings than any other factor. For more information on that, see an excellent extension publication titled “Enhancing Reforestation Success in the Inland Northwest”, downloadable at <https://www.uidaho.edu/extension/publications/publication-detail?id=pnw0520>

Many forest owners find tree planting to be one of the most meaningful activities they engage in. If you have the right site and can get the right kind of seedlings, fall planting is a good option to consider. ■

Thanks to Andrew Nelson and Kennon McLintock for review and comment.

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.



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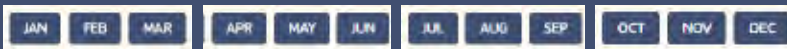


January

MO	TU	WE	TH	FR	SA
1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12
14	15	16	17	18	19
21	22	23	24	25	26
28	29	30	31		

AG Event Promo Community Calendar

SEASONAL & RETAIL CAMPAIGNS



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Idaho State Department of Agriculture

WEED OF THE MONTH



CONTROL AND MANAGEMENT OPTIONS:

In many areas, mechanical harvesting/dredging is possible. As with most noxious weeds, this one will most likely not be noticed until it is a large, serious problem. Once it reaches an epidemic state, aquatically approved herbicides may be used to control it when it is actively growing. Application is very difficult without an airboat. There are numerous biological control insects that feed on this plant. Always make sure that your watercraft and trailer are free from 'hitchhikers' when you pull out of a launch site to ensure that you are not going to take this plant from one water body to another. Never transport unknown plant material or dispose of aquarium contents in bodies of water. If you think that you have it, call for proper identification and consider environmental issues when trying to treat.

WATER HYACINTH

Water hyacinth is a free-floating plant that has been determined to be the biggest invader in the U.S. This aquatic perennial plant has stolons – that is, the plant can spread by broken plant parts, which can start new plants. The main areas of concern are near any of the 1200 hot springs that exist throughout the state. This plant has a very waxy cupped-shaped leaf and produces a lavender and yellow flower. It has been found in the Snake River, in the Thousand Springs area, and is now illegal to sell or grow. It is an emerged free-floating plant, which means that it floats above the water surface. The weed completely covers the water surface, thus choking out all other vegetation and creating great habitat for mosquitoes. This not only removes food for fish, but can cause problems with irrigation and creates more stagnate water. Near-freezing to freezing temperatures of up to 48 hours do not affect the Water Hyacinth stem base survival, even with ice formation so be on the lookout for them this winter! Don't even think about getting a boat into the water as it will stop a propeller and plug up a jet boat.



For more information on Water Hyacinth and Idaho's other listed noxious weeds go to the Idaho Weed Awareness Campaign website at:
[http://idahoweedawareness.org / idahos-noxious-weeds/](http://idahoweedawareness.org/idahos-noxious-weeds/)

UI Extension researchers raise alfalfa as annual crop for nitrogen benefits

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

University of Idaho Extension forage and small grains researchers are testing a seemingly counterintuitive theory that local farmers could reap rewards by planting alfalfa varieties that weren't bred to withstand Idaho's cold winters.

The team is in the first year of a planned three-year trial at the University of Idaho's Aberdeen Research and Extension Center evaluating the planting of non-dormant alfalfa varieties — those that don't enter winter dormancy — in Idaho as a means of improving soil health and fixing extra nitrogen to benefit future crops.

Alfalfa is traditionally raised as a perennial crop that remains in production for four or five seasons, until declining hay quality and yields prompt farmers to remove it.

As with most legumes, alfalfa can produce nodules on its roots where soil bacteria convert nitrogen from the atmosphere into a plant-usable form.

UI Extension researchers Jared Spackman, Reed Findlay, David Callister, Jared Gibbons, Joseph Sagers and Tom Jacobsen anticipate Idaho farmers stand to significantly increase nitrogen fixation by planting alfalfa varieties developed for warmer states, such as Arizona, that don't have to expend energy late in the season to become winter hardy.

The researchers explain that rather than thickening taproots and bulking up their crowns to avoid winter kill, the non-dormant varieties popular in warmer climates are free to focus energy on fixing more nitrogen.

"The reason we're doing this now is because alfalfa prices rose significantly over the last five years and fertilizer costs also rose significantly," Findlay said. "We're going to beat this thing at both ends of the stick."

Non-dormant alfalfa raised in Aberdeen should yield a single season of three cuttings and die in the winter, providing growers with a cash crop while reducing future fertilizer costs.

Findlay conducted a similar trial in Utah several years ago and found a non-dormant alfalfa variety bred to optimize nitrogen fixation, called Nitro, produced enough nitrogen to support either a barley or corn crop during the following season, as well as a full barley crop during the third season.

In the current trial, Findlay and his colleagues are testing a variety related to the one Findlay previously experimented with, called High Nitro. They're comparing it against Stratica, which is a Roundup Ready conventional alfalfa variety commonly raised in Idaho.

"One of the things we're interested in is if there is a nitrogen benefit of High Nitro versus Stratica," Spackman said.



Photo by John O'Connell

University of Idaho Extension researchers harvest alfalfa raised as an annual crop for enhanced nitrogen fixation at the U of I Aberdeen Research and Extension Center.

To evaluate the ability of the two alfalfa varieties to supply nitrogen for fall or spring seeded barley production, the Extension educators will establish plots receiving multiple nitrogen fertilizer application rates including a non-fertilized check.

Comparing both fall and spring alfalfa should help the researchers determine how quickly nitrogen is released and made available to subsequent small grain crops.

The researchers will also evaluate protein levels, yield, energy content and digestibility of the hay varieties. Yields from the first two cuttings of both varieties were comparable.

A secondary benefit of raising alfalfa for a single season is that it would allow small grain farmers to diversify their rotations, control weeds using different herbicides and break the cycle of disease.

Furthermore, alfalfa killed by the winter cold would lend organic matter to soil. Idaho farmers often plant cover crops — crops grown primarily for soil-health benefits — to accomplish such results. Non-dormant hay would give farmers the benefits both of a cover crop and a cash crop.

Findlay believes the timing is right for the research, given that the market outlook is for fuel prices, which are tied to fertilizer prices, to continue rising.

"The higher fertilizer prices go, the more apt people are to look at different ways of farming," Findlay said. "This study is really important to find out because I think it's on us as researchers to figure it out before growers put the annual alfalfa in." ■



Gov. Little's Mexico trade mission strengthens trade opportunities for Idaho agriculture

Governor Little recently led a productive five-day trade mission to Mexico. Alongside Governor Little, the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, Idaho Department of Commerce, Idaho businesses and educational institutions, had the chance to engage with Mexican business leaders and government officials to promote Idaho products and grow exports.

The trade mission was an effort to reinforce Idaho's longstanding partnership with Mexico and develop additional opportunities for Idaho businesses. In 2022, Mexico ranked as the sixth largest export destination overall for Idaho and the second largest export destination for Idaho food and agriculture products. Mexico is also one of the most important economic centers in Latin America. Total Idaho exports to Mexico exceeded \$202 million last year.

"Throughout the trade mission, we forged valuable connections, reinforcing Idaho's longstanding trade partnership with Mexico. These interactions not only solidified the state's economic ties but also paved the way for fresh opportunities in trade and investment, contributing to the ongoing enhancement of Idaho's economy," Governor Little said.

A total of 20 businesses and organizations made up the Idaho delegation, amongst these organizations included the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation. Trade missions have historically been an effective strategy for increasing exports, expanding business for Idaho companies and stimulating the economy, with this recent trip being no exception. Agricultural priorities on this trade mission emphasized market opportunities for fresh potatoes, onions, dairy genetics, cheese, dairy ingredients, bean seed and malt.

A major highlight of the trip was the visit to the Central de Abastos, the world's largest wholesale produce market. Governor Little, Director Tewalt and delegation members visited with key importers of Idaho fresh potatoes and onions to further expand sales opportunities for Idaho suppliers. Idaho's potato exports to Mexico increased over 60 percent from 2022 to 2023. This represents a significant victory for Idaho and serves as a noteworthy example of how strategic market development efforts can effectively address crucial issues in fresh produce trade, ultimately creating opportunities for Idaho spuds. Other highlights included:

Governor Little met with Roberto Velasco Alvarez, Chief Officer for North America at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to strengthen the bilateral relationship between Idaho and Mexico.

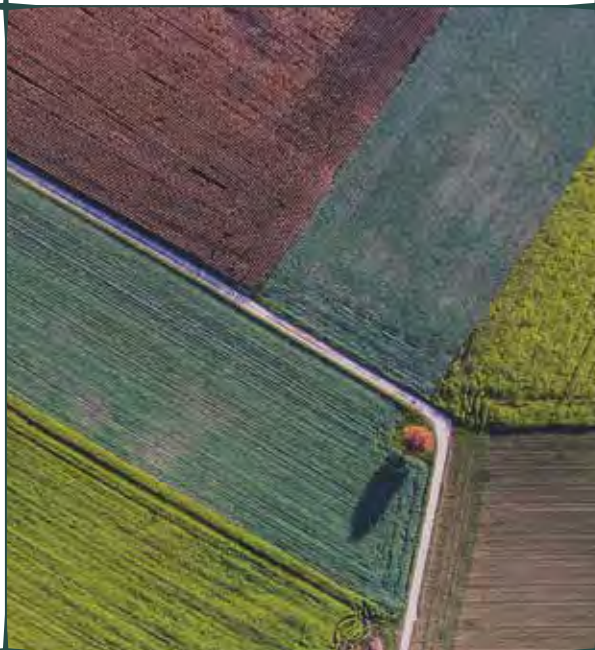
At the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CYMMIT), an international non-profit research and training center, University of Idaho College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and various Idaho commodity groups began discussions about research collaboration in wheat breeding, sustainability, and bean seed development.

Governor Little and delegation members met with Walmart de Mexico y Centroamerica to promote Idaho potatoes, onions, cheese, health and body products, and cold chain monitoring technology to Mexico's largest retailer with more than 2,800 retail outlets in the country.

Governor Little promoted Idaho malt to Constellation Brands Mexico, the producers of more than 400 million cases of beer annually in Mexico.

"It was a meaningful experience to meet with our Mexican partners face to face and share the value of doing business and collaborating with Idaho companies, organizations, and state agencies. It was an honor to represent and showcase Idaho agriculture to our friends in Mexico as the Farm Bureau continues to empower the agricultural industry in the state," said Braden Jensen, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation.

This trade mission was an opportunity to address several trade constraints and was only the beginning of working towards removing barriers and opening doors for Idaho companies. While Idaho's agricultural industry produces products and commodities that are amongst the best in the world, the ISDA remains dedicated to showcasing the state's agricultural sector on the international stage.



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Photos by Joel Benson

The Omodt blueberry farm in Bonner County, shown here, is one of many very small farms located in the county. The county has a very diverse portfolio when it comes to the types of agricultural commodities produced there.

Bonner County agriculture dominated by lots of small farms

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

SANDPOINT – Bonner County ranks No. 3 out of Idaho’s 44 counties when it comes to total number of farms, but most of those farms are very small compared to the statewide average.

For the most part, “It’s micro-farming on 10 acres or less,” says Fred Omodt, who operates a 5.5-acre blueberry farm near Sandpoint.

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, there were 1,213 farms in Bonner County during the 2017 census year. The average size of farm in the county was 74 acres, much less than the statewide average of 468 acres.

“Agriculture in Bonner County is on a small scale,” says Bob Smathers, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation’s regional field manager in north Idaho. “There are lots of small farms in the county, ranging from tomato, blueberry, ornamental trees and shrubs, and vegetable production to hay, some grain, cattle, and everything in-between.”

Omodt says the variety of agricultural commodities being pro-

“[The growth] is providing customers. A lot of them are really into local or organically grown food. That’s a plus.”

- Fred Omodt, Sandpoint farmer

duced in the county is very diverse but it’s just being done on a small scale.

“The number of small, agricultural niche type of stuff here is really impressive,” he says. “It’s small acreage and it’s very diverse. The variety of crops and products produced here is every bit as diverse as it is down in southern Idaho. It’s just not on as grand a scale.”

There is a U-pick flower farm on 3 acres just up the street from the Omodt blueberry farm, as well as a small chicken egg farm and he says a lot of folks around there also grow truck crops for local restaurants and food co-ops in Moscow.

There are several flower farms within a 10-mile radius of the Omodt blueberry farm.

There are also small operations in the county growing alpacas, sheep, goats, turkeys, hogs and other animals.

There are some big agricultural operations in the county, Omodt says, including a major hop farm, a big beekeeping operation and some sizable cattle operations.

“But for the most part, it’s small farming,” he says.

There is also a lot of high-value timber produced in the county, which has several mills, and a lot

of Christmas trees are grown there, as well as trees for landscaping.

Hay is the main crop in the county when it comes to total acres and the ag census shows there were 21,602 acres of hay grown in Bonner County in 2017. A much smaller amount of wheat, oats and barley were also grown there.

There is a considerable amount of cattle produced in the county, which includes a USDA inspected meat plant, and Smathers says the cattle market in the county provides a good market for feeder hay.

According to the census of ag, 98 percent of the farms in the county are family farms and 13 percent sell directly to consumers, significantly higher than the statewide average of 7 percent who sell directly.

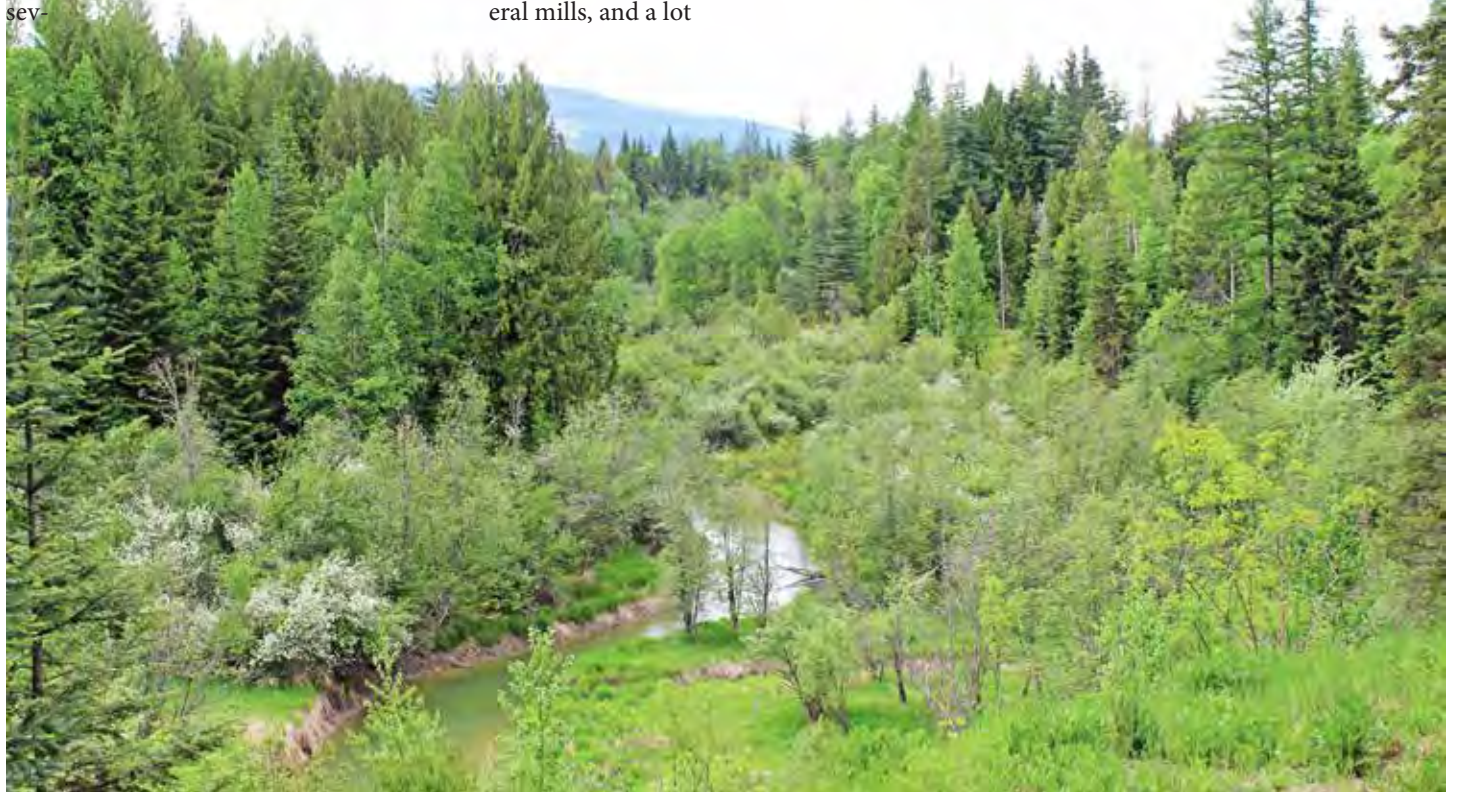
Because most of the farms in Bonner County are very small, labor is not as big an issue for agricultural producers there as it is in some other areas, Omodt says.

“We don’t have labor issues,” he says. “Most people here don’t run a big payroll.”

Population growth and the ensuing development pressure are starting to become issues and the development is leading to higher property values and thus taxes, Omodt says.

However, the growth is bringing in customers to an agricultural base that for the most part makes its living off of selling to restaurants, food co-ops and directly to consumers, as well as through farmers markets.

“It is providing customers,” Omodt says of the growth. “A lot of them are really into local or organically grown food. That’s a plus.” ■



There is a lot of high-value timber produced in Bonner County, which is home to several mills.

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What's Richard Durrant cookin'?

Hot breakfast boosts productivity for modern farm family

By Dianna Troyer
For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

With modern farm families juggling myriad time commitments, how could the schedules of seven households coordinate to get the workday started early at Big D Ranch Inc. near Kuna?

During 2016, Richard Durrant came up with a culinary solution that added yet another hat – that of breakfast chef – to the many he already wears as the ranch's general manager, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation vice president, a volunteer with numerous ag organizations, and a member of the Kuna Fire Department.

"It's win-win-win for me personally as dad, granddad, and farm manager," said Durrant, who cooks a hot breakfast and serves it at 6:30 a.m. for about 20 eager eaters during the workweek.

The Durrants are an example of a modern farm family finding innovative ways to increase productivity. They just happen to start their day an old-fashioned way – eating a hot meal together.

Whatever he does, Durrant's trademark humor hovers over the family business.

"It's exciting to have a fourth-generation family farming operation like this – just so I can run it to torment people," he said. "Seriously, though, we're blessed that six of our seven kids are still working with me on the farm. Before I started doing this, by the time they got their kids off to school, the workday here was starting at about 9. With everyone together, we get started at about 7:30 when the kids get on the bus here."

Big D Ranch Inc. produces sugar beets, corn, wheat, dry beans, alfalfa and mint on 1,500 acres. The family also operates a 2 million bushel elevator and feed store for local farmers.

Durrant admits he has an ulterior motive other than starting the workday early.

"I get to start my day talking with the people who mean the most to me – and all it costs me is bribing everyone with break-

"Off the farm, one of my goals is to advocate for a stable agricultural environment to enable farmers and ranchers to prosper and live an American dream."

- Richard Durrant, Kuna farmer/IFBF vice president



Photos courtesy of the Durrant family

At 6:30 a.m., Richard Durrant serves a hot breakfast he has made for his kids and grandkids, enabling the work day to start early at Big D Ranch Inc. near Kuna.

fast," Durrant said, laughing. "Knowing they're coming energizes me to get up at 5:30 – well, on some days I call it my 'necessary evil.'"

Life lessons

He admits that along with nourishing his family's bodies, he tries to feed their souls, too, sneaking in a few life lessons with his actions as much as words.

"The grandkids see adults working and know we have high expectations of them, too, to help out as they're able," he says. "After school I always have something waiting for them – picking pumpkins or flowers, raking leaves, shoveling snow. We're not the type to sit around indoors playing video games or looking at the internet."

Along with teaching a work ethic and to do your best, he points out the power of teamwork and building strong relationships despite differences.

"We all have different personalities – don't serve eggs to some and never blueberries to another – but we all come together when we find common ground, making the ranch productive," he said.

Their business model has been successful. In 2016, the Durrants were named the Western Idaho Fair Farm Family and two years later were selected as the Leadership Idaho Agriculture Farm Legacy Family.

Innovation and flexibility have always run in the Durrant



ABOVE: The Durrant family gathers at Richard Durrant's table each morning for a hot breakfast.
RIGHT: Crepes are a popular entrée.

family, ever since Richard's grandfather, Clarence, moved from Utah to Kuna in 1946 to start Big D Ranch. Richard's father, David, was 15 at the time.

By 1953, the Durrants were raising 800 chicks and supplying eggs to local restaurants and grocery stores.

Farming heritage

By the time Richard was growing up in the family business, he was helping to care for 80,000 laying hens, 300 dairy cows, and farming 500 acres.

To shift to a less intensive and more profitable business model, the Durrant family eventually quit the egg business and launched a feed store where the chicken house once stood.

"You have to be flexible," Durrant said.

All joking aside, Durrant said providing his children and grandchildren with many opportunities to continue their decades-long farming heritage is deeply gratifying.

"Off the farm, one of my goals is to advocate for a stable agricultural environment to enable farmers and ranchers to prosper and live an American dream," he said.

While Durrant imparts life lessons in the morning, the obvious joy for the kids and their parents is eating a delicious breakfast.

Durrant gets a five-star rating from his family and chronicles his mouth-watering menus on his Richard Durrant Facebook page. Friends post messages that they "will be over soon" and want to become "his adopted grandchildren."

He offers restaurant quality choices – omelets, burritos, oatmeal, fresh fruit, fried potatoes, pancakes, waffles, crepes, bacon, ham, sausage, breakfast casserole, even breakfast pizza.

His granddaughter Jaylee, a sixth-grader, said, "G-Pa's hot breakfasts get me going – better than cold cereal would. French toast is my favorite. Starting the day here puts us in a good mood. He's loving and makes us laugh."

Simon, an eighth-grader, agrees with his cousin. "He seems to always make something new, like breakfast pizza. His breakfasts give me energy for the whole day."

Durrant said his crepes are a frequently requested entrée. The grandkids slather on syrups, chocolate or butterscotch sauce, fruit and whipped cream.

"My wife thinks I'm too generous, especially with the whipped cream – just



because I buy it in cases," he said, laughing.

While he's cooking breakfast, his wife, Denese, is getting ready for her job as a paraprofessional working with special education students at nearby Kuna Middle School.

"It's the best way to start the day," Durrant said after cleaning up.

Judging from all the Facebook photos, his appreciative children and grandchildren would agree. ■



Photo by Sean Ellis

Potatoes are harvested in a field near Firth in the fall of 2023. Total net farm income in the United States is expected to decline by 17 percent in 2023, following a record year in 2022.

U.S. net farm income will be down substantially in 2023

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – Total net farm income in the United States is expected to be down significantly in 2023, following a record year in 2022.

The latest farm sector income forecast by USDA's Economic Research Service expects total net farm income in the U.S. during 2023 to fall by 17.4 percent, or \$31.8 billion, to a total of \$151.1 billion.

The U.S. set a total net farm income record of \$182.8 billion in calendar year 2022, which was a 30.2 percent, or \$42.4 billion, increase over 2021.

This year looks to be a different story, as declining farm-level commodity prices and rising production expenses bite into net farm income, which is a broad measure of profits and the farmer and rancher's bottom line.

"2023 is going to be a tougher year for the agricultural indus-

try," said University of Idaho Agricultural Economist Brett Wilder. "For almost every ag industry, except for cattle and calves, it was a tighter year financially."

These latest farm income forecasts are included in the "2023 Farm Sector Income Forecast" released Nov. 30 by USDA's Economic Research Service.

The report forecasts U.S. farm cash receipts, which is what the farmer or rancher receives for their commodity, will total \$509.6 billion in 2023. That would be a decrease of \$25.2 billion, or 4.7 percent, compared with what was a record high in 2022.

Total crop cash receipts are expected to decline by 4.4 percent, or \$12.1 billion, and total animal and animal product receipts are forecast to decline by 5 percent, or \$13 billion.

Most of the decline in farm cash receipts "is due to low prices received by farmers for their commodity products relative to 2022," USDA senior economist Carrie Litkowski said Nov. 30 while detailing highlights of the report.

The USDA forecast expects total farm and ranch production

expenses to rise by 3.5 percent this year, or \$14.9 billion. The largest increase in expenses is expected in interest payments (up 42.9 percent), and livestock and poultry purchases are forecast to be up 19.6 percent.

Total labor expenses for farmers and ranchers are forecast to rise by 3.9 percent.

Total spending on fertilizer is forecast to be down 14 percent in 2023, and fuels and oils and feed are also expected to decline in 2023 relative to 2022. Feed expenses are expected to decline by 2.5 percent from last year's record total.

U.S. farmers and ranchers had record production expenses in 2022.

This year, they are expected to rise even further, at the same time that farm-level commodity prices are decreasing.

Coupled with lower cash receipts, "These higher expenses would lower income," Litkowski said.

Adjusted for inflation, U.S. net farm income is expected to decline by 20 percent in 2023 relative to 2022.

Total direct federal government payments to farmers and ranchers are also expected to decline by 22 percent in 2023. Direct government payments are expected to total \$12 billion in 2023.

Government payments to farmers and ranchers hit a record \$45.6 billion in 2020 and most of those payments that year were related to pandemic-related assistance. They have decreased every year since.

A bit of good news contained in the report is that overall farm sector equity is expected to improve by 6.9 percent, or \$229.4 billion, in 2023 and farm bankruptcies are expected to decline.

Farm bankruptcy rates have trended down in recent years and reached less than 1 per 10,000 farms in 2022, Litkowski said.

They are forecast to fall even further in 2023 based on filings through September, she added.

The next USDA Farm Sector Income Forecast will be released Feb. 27 and will update the 2023 forecast and provide the first forecast for 2024.

Total U.S. farm cash receipts for many of the main agricultural commodities produced in Idaho are expected to fall in 2023 compared with 2022.

Milk receipts in the U.S. are forecast to decrease by 18.3 percent, or \$10.5 billion. Dairy is Idaho's main ag commodity in terms of farm cash receipts and the state's 360 dairies brought in about \$4.2 billion in farm receipts in 2022.

However, U.S. farm cash receipts for cattle and calves, Idaho's No. 2 ag commodity, are expected to rise by 16.6 percent, or \$14.3 billion.

Wheat receipts nationwide are forecast to decrease by 1.3 percent and corn receipts are expected to decline by 10.6 percent.

Cash receipts for vegetables and melons, a category that includes potatoes, are expected to decline by 2.4 percent in 2023. However, that estimate includes a projected increase of \$600 million in potato receipts in 2023. Potatoes are Idaho's No. 3 ag commodity in terms of total cash receipts.

Cash receipts nationwide for hay, Idaho's No. 4 ag commodity, are forecast to increase by 8.6 percent, or \$900 million. ■

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USDA introduces geospatial data product to show crop rotation patterns

USDA news release

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently unveiled a geospatial product called Crop Sequence Boundaries (CSB) that offers public access to national-scale visual crop rotation data for the first time.

The new tool was developed by USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) and Economic Research Service (ERS), two of the department's statistical scientific research agencies.

CSB is a cutting-edge map of agricultural fields that provides crop acreage estimates and historical planting decisions across the contiguous United States.

The open-source product uses satellite imagery and other public data to allow users to analyze planted U.S. commodities, enhancing not only agricultural science and research, but providing producers an innovative resource to help make farming decisions.

"CSB gives farmers a chance to look at area farmland and see how remote sensing is capturing planting decisions," said NASS Administrator Hubert Hamer. "Farmers will be able to use eight years of historical crop rotations to enhance their farm records or look at the management history of land that they might have recently started operating. They can also look at how their planting decisions compare in their regions."

New farmers or farmers considering renting land could also use CSB to decide which crop to plant based on past rotations, such as corn to soy, and researchers can conduct analyses at the field level, such as studying conservation practices for a particular field.

The tool fills a gap between existing data sources, offering a more comprehensive picture and data in one place that is not provided by most other field-level products.

CSB incorporates technological ad-



Photo by Sean Ellis

A potato field near American Falls is irrigated July 10. A new geospatial tool unveiled by USDA offers public access to national-scale visual crop rotation data for the first time.

vances in satellite imagery and high-performance cloud computing with Google Earth Engine. It is one of several tools that NASS and its partners have developed over the years to support agricultural analyses and to make data more accessible and valuable to the public.

Kevin Hunt, a senior geographer at NASS, said having a representative field to predict crop planting and acreage for the upcoming season based on common historical crop rotations is beneficial as a supplement to producer-supplied data.

ERS Economist Maria Bowman noted that ERS is using the product to study changes in farm management practices, such as tillage or cover cropping, over time. This will help USDA agencies understand the impacts of conservation programs that provide financial support for these practices.

This product represents an automated and repeatable method for estimating fields from public data.

"For researchers, CSB is useful because many farm decisions are made at the

field level," said ERS Administrator Spiro Stefanou. "CSB represents an advancement in agricultural research by using high-performance cloud computing to promote competitiveness by making information on planting decisions more accessible to everyone."

The CSB data sets for 2015 to 2022 are available for download and can be viewed at the state and county-level using an interactive map.

This new tool supports strategies outlined in USDA's recently released Science and Research Strategy, including improving and expanding new tools for understanding crop production to supplement other USDA spatial tools like COMET – Planner Global.

USDA science is envisioning new ways to look at old challenges and everyday decisions to support our nation's farmers and ranchers.

For NASS data and access to CSB and other geospatial resources, visit www.nass.usda.gov. ■

Ginger Sugar Cookies



Ingredients

- 2 cups sifted all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon cloves
- 1/4 cup light molasses
- 1 teaspoon ginger
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/3 cups sugar
- 3/4 cup shortening
- 1 egg

Directions

Preheat oven to 370 degrees. Sift flour with soda, cinnamon, cloves, ginger and salt. Set aside.

Into the large bowl of electric mixer, gradually add one cup sugar to shortening, creaming at medium speed with electric mixer, until very light and fluffy (about 5 minutes) Blend in molasses and egg. At low speed, beat in flour mixture just until well mixed, scraping down side of the bowl with a rubber scraper.

Pinch off piece of dough; share into 1 1/4 inch balls. Roll in remaining sugar. Place 2 1/2 inches apart on a greased cookie sheet. Bake 8-10 minutes. These cookies will have a crinkled surface. Recipe makes 3 dozen.



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