

GEM STATE **Producer** Idaho Farm Bureau.

April 2024 • Volume 28 Issue 3

New Ag Census Out
How Has Idaho Changed?





AI's growing role in agriculture

Many times, while standing on the very land my father and grandfather cultivated, I reflect on how things have changed. From the adoption of new sustainability practices to our approach to livestock management, our farming methods have evolved significantly. Gone are the days of relying on a walkie-talkie at our hip and a small notebook and pencil tucked into our front pockets.

Don't get me wrong – those tools were powerful in their day. But now we have so

much technology at our fingertips and at the wheel of our machinery.

Today, new technologies, innovations and sustainability practices are emerging and reshaping the future of agriculture. Now, with the integration of Artificial Intelligence, the possibilities seem endless. Farmers get a front row seat to the latest innovations as we have the opportunity to embrace these new frontiers in agriculture.

See DUVALL, page 6

The President's Desk

By Bryan Searle

President, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



Good, bad and ugly of 2022 ag census

There is some good news, bad news and downright ugly news contained in the 2022 Census of Agriculture.

Data for the 2022 ag census was released Feb. 13 and it shows there are 14 percent more new and beginning agricultural producers in Idaho.

New and beginning producers are defined by the ag census as those who have been working 10 years or less on any farm or ranch. The total number matching that requirement

in Idaho was 14,978 in 2022, up 14 percent from 2017.

That certainly qualified as good news.

The ag census also showed that Idaho as a state ranked sixth in the nation in terms of average farm-gate revenue per farm or ranch.

And the Gem State ranked fifth in the United States when it comes to total income generated per agritourism operation.

The data shows that Idaho remains the

See SEARLE, page 7

Inside Farm Bureau

By Zak Miller

CEO, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



Idaho agriculture is essential

The IFBF Vision statement comprises three significant words that serve as a guiding principle for our volunteers and staff in advocating for agriculture: "For all to **RECOGNIZE** and **RESPECT** Idaho agriculture as **ESSENTIAL**."

Recognize: Recognition means acknowledging achievements or qualities based on factors like talent, hard work or contributions.

Respect: Respect is admiration for abilities, qualities or achievements earned through

actions that demonstrate integrity, competence or kindness.

Essential: Essential is fundamental and cannot be easily replaced without significant impact.

To summarize, **Recognition** acknowledges presence or achievements. **Respect** entails admiration and regard for character or abilities. Finally, **Essential** means indispensable or crucial for a specific purpose or function.

See MILLER, page 6



Idaho Farm Bureau.

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Photo by Joel Benson

Haystack and pivot near Shelley, Idaho. The new ag census is used by both agriculturists and policy makers.

Idaho 2022 Census of Agriculture highlights

By Ben Johnson, State Statistician – Idaho
USDA | National Agricultural Statistics Service

- Farm related income besides commodity sales \$327,387,000, up 23% from 2017.
 - » Idaho Agritourism brought in \$16,909,000 total (25th in nation) in 2022, an 83% increase from 2017. With 200 operations reporting agritourism income, Idaho ranks 5th in the nation with \$85,545 of agritourism income per operation.
- Idaho’s average value of commodity sales per farm operation is \$476,120, ranking 6th in the nation with average sales per farm.
 - » Idaho’s total market value of agricultural products sold of \$10,892,201,000 in 2022, represents about 2% of U.S. agricultural sales (ranking 19th in the nation).
- Cattle continue to outpopulate people in Idaho, with 2.5 million head of cattle at the end of 2022, and 1.9 million people estimated living Idaho in 2022.
- Cattle play an important role in Idaho, with the top two commodities of dairy and beef accounting for about 55% of Idaho’s total agricultural value of production in 2022.
- Idaho pastureland of over 5 million acres represents 43% of Idaho’s land in farms, and 9% of all land in Idaho.
- Idaho Potatoes continue to hold the number 3 spot in the State and the number 1 spot in the Nation, representing 27% of total U.S. acreage, while Idaho, Washington and Oregon combine for 50% of the U.S. acreage.
- With about 540,000 acres of Barley in Idaho accounting for 22% of the Nations barley acres in 2022, Idaho growers produced 52 million bushels, ranking first in the nation and accounting for nearly a third of the U.S. barley production.
- Of the 3,143 counties in the nation, Cassia and Twin Falls counties ranked 40th and 41st respectively for value of agricultural products sold. Gooding County was close behind at 44th.
- There were 14,798 Idaho farmers with 10 or fewer years spent on any farm, an increase in the number of beginning farmers from 2017 of 14%.

(See story on page 4 for more about the 2022 Ag Census)



Idaho Farm Bureau Federation photo

Barley is harvested in a field near Soda Springs in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo. Idaho lost 2,119 farms between 2017 and 2022, according to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, which was released Feb. 13.

Ag census shows Idaho lost 2,119 farms

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – Idaho lost 2,119 farms, or 8.5 percent of its total farms, between 2017 and 2022, according to the 2022 Census of Agriculture.

Data from the 2022 ag census was released Feb. 13 and it showed there were 22,877 farms and ranches in Idaho during the 2022 census year. That was down from 24,996 farms during the 2017 census year.

The data shows there were 1.9 million farms and ranches in the

United States in 2022. That was 7 percent, or 142,000, fewer farms than during 2017.

The Census of Agriculture is conducted every five years and is the only source of uniform, comprehensive and impartial agricultural data. It provides millions of potential data points on U.S. farming, down to the county level.

The 2022 census shows there was 11.55 million acres of total farmland – this includes crop and pasture

land – in Idaho during the recent census year. That is a 1.2 percent, or 144,000-acre, drop from the 11.69 million acres of total farmland in the state in 2017.

Nationwide, the amount of total farmland in 2022 was 880 million acres, down 2.2 percent from 900 million acres in 2017.

While presenting highlights of the recent ag census during a livestream event Feb. 13, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack said the loss of farms and farmland in the U.S. is concerning to him.

“Survey after survey continues to show a decline in the number of farms and in farmland,” he said. “The amount of farm decline is significant. It’s particularly significant in this survey.”

To put the loss of 20 million acres of U.S. farmland in perspective, Vilsack pointed out that would equal the land mass of every New England state, with the exception of Connecticut.

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President Bryan Searle, who farms in Shelley, said the loss of farmland is also of concern to Idaho’s agricultural industry and shows why it is important for IFBF and other farm organizations to continue to find ways to try to slow the rate of farmland loss in the state.

According to a University of Idaho study released this year, agriculture is directly and indirectly responsible for 13 percent of Idaho’s total gross state product, one in every 9 jobs and 17 percent of the state’s total economic output.

“It’s heart-wrenching to learn we lost more than 2,000 farms and 144,000 acres of farmland,” he said. “As Idaho Farm Bureau joins other organizations in trying to find a way to slow the loss of the state’s precious farm ground, this latest ag census data serves as sort of a wake-up call on the importance of those efforts.”

The Census of Agriculture was first conducted in 1840 and its data is available for the national, state and county levels, as well as by congressional district, zip code and by watershed.

“For decades, the information provided through the Census of Agriculture has helped us understand American ag,” Chavonda Jacobs-Young, USDA Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics, said during the livestream event.

She said the data is critically important in supporting sound policy and decision making.

“Bottom line, we need data to make

well-informed decisions,” Jacobs-Young said.

Other national and Idaho highlights of the 2022 Census of Agriculture:

- The average size of a farm in Idaho during 2022 was 505 acres, up 8 percent from 468 acres in 2017. Nationally, the average size of farm in 2022 was 463 acres, up from 441 acres in 2017.
- Canyon County had the most farms in Idaho in 2022, with 2,311. Twin Falls County ranked second (1,169), followed by Ada County (1,142) and Bingham County (1,081).
- When it comes to total value of agricultural production, Cassia County ranked No. 1 among the state’s 44 counties with \$1.15 billion in 2022. Twin Falls County ranked second (\$1.14 billion), followed by Gooding County (\$1.12 billion), Jerome County (\$944 million) and Canyon County (\$829 million).
- The average age of an agricultural producer in Idaho was 56.6 in 2022, up slightly from 56.4 percent in 2017. Nationally, the average age of a farmer ticked up from 57.5 in 2017 to 58.1 in 2022. ■



Photo by James Gallacci

Changing landscape in Southwest Idaho.

Continued from page 2

Last week, I had the opportunity to travel to Houston, Texas, for Commodity Classic to meet with fellow farmers and step into the future of agriculture. Commodity Classic is renowned for providing unparalleled insight and access to the latest advancements in agriculture. And from the moment I stepped onto that trade show floor, I was surrounded by an atmosphere buzzing with excitement and possibilities. A great example of where new frontiers begin in farming with groundbreaking technologies and research.

From drones and robots to new data intake and analysis programs, there was much about the future to be captivated by, especially when it came to this new central theme of Artificial Intelligence. For example, I was able to see how farmers are now able to better analyze crop yield and soil health by having easy access to the soil sampling of their county or having that technology to do it themselves—data that used to involve numerous players and take weeks to gather, now being done almost instantly.

‘AI is increasingly being woven into the latest technology and farm equipment, offering farmers unprecedented insight and efficiency.’

This was also the case with new AI-powered crop management software. Farmers can now use platforms remotely to monitor crop health in real-time—able to detect early signs of disease, pests and nutrient deficiencies.

Lastly, I had the chance to step into the advancement of machinery by seeing how new equipment uses AI algorithms to autonomously navigate numerous tasks on the farm such as planting, weeding and spraying.

To be honest, I’m not even sure I can fully explain everything I saw and how it works. It was a mix of excitement and uncertainty of the unknown – but there are plenty of things to learn about as we find ways to continue our efforts to make better decisions for our farms. It was also evident that, across the board, AI is not merely a trend in agriculture but a transformative element shaping the future of American agriculture. ■

Continued from page 2

Idaho’s citizens and lawmakers know the importance of agriculture in the state. However, whether they consider it an essential part of the state’s economy is constantly being defined.

Idaho has a rich agricultural heritage strongly tied to its history, culture and sense of community. As our state welcomes more residents, we often hear the phrase “Don’t change Idaho, let Idaho change you”—a nod to our agricultural roots that is not just a physical presence in our soil, but a deeply held value that resides in our hearts.

As I watch each season of bounty pass, my recognition of this industry turns to a deeper respect for agriculture. It is an industry actively preserving the state’s environmental health and natural beauty. Farmers and ranchers in Idaho are stewards of the land, implementing sustainable practices to protect soil, water and air quality. These efforts ensure the long-term viability of our state’s natural resources.

Deserving of even more respect is Idaho’s agricultural economic

‘The ability of agriculture to stave off world hunger and malnutrition is directly affected by policymakers genuinely supporting agriculture today.’

power. According to the University of Idaho, this industry contributes over \$37.5 billion in annual sales, 17% of the state’s total economy. This economic impact extends beyond the farm gate, supporting food processing, transportation and retail industries.

Farmers and ranchers cannot grow a crop from past efforts, and our industry cannot rely on past successes. The question

is whether our neighbors and elected leaders will continue prioritizing agricultural needs as essential.

The University of Idaho reports that one out of every nine jobs, which amounts to 128,800 jobs in Idaho, is related to agriculture. This highlights how crucial farm workers are and how essential their role is in our society. Occasionally, we hear online chatter falsely claiming that farmers are not fully invested in the ag workforce. This is incorrect. They are essential as they work alongside our farm families.

The Farm Bureau and other agricultural groups are working together to address this misconception and raise awareness about the challenges caused by existing programs. They are also striving to find solutions that will provide a legal and equitable guest-worker program for all segments of the agricultural industry.

Some chatter also suggests that agricultural jobs only go to US citizens, but this is unrealistic. This is a complex issue with

many questions and concerns that need to be addressed. If we all recognize the essential need for agriculture and the critical role that farm workers play, we can work towards finding solutions.

Being essential means making hard choices, often choosing between better and best. There is no turning back when agriculture is moved to the backseat. Honestly, I do not believe that agriculture will disappear. People have to eat. However, the ability of agriculture to stave off world hunger and malnutrition is directly affected by policymakers genuinely supporting agriculture today.

Agriculture must be treated as essential. This does not mean that growth and change should end; it does mean there are times when agriculture should be prioritized. We are grateful for a state that recognizes and respects agriculture. We need leaders willing to make difficult choices at times so that agriculture remains essential for future generations. ■

SEARLE

Continued from page 2

potato state and again led the nation in total spud production in 2022, as it does every year.

We are also the barley, peppermint, alfalfa hay and food trout state, as well, and led the nation in total production of those commodities during the ag census year.

Those are some of the bits of good news contained in the 2022 Census of Agriculture.

The bad news? Well, the average age of U.S. farmers and ranchers continues to climb up, slowly.

The recent ag census data show that the average age of a producer in Idaho ticked up slightly, from 56.4 in 2017 to 56.6 in 2022.

For those who are curious, the average age of an agricultural producer in the United States ticked up also, from 57.5 to 58.1.

In what will come as no shocker to any farmer or rancher, total production expenses in Idaho soared 40 percent from 2017 to 2022, from \$6.65 billion to \$9.32 billion.

In what surely qualified as ugly news, the ag census shows that Idaho lost 8 percent of its farms from 2017 to 2022. The total number of farm and ranch operations in Idaho dropped from 24,996 in 2017 to 22,877 in 2022.

‘Although most of the farms lost in the state and nation during that five-year period were small farms, it’s still not a good trajectory. And we mourn the loss of any farm or ranch, regardless of its size.’

The bottom line is that Idaho lost 2,119 agricultural operations, which averages to a little over one per day.

Nationwide, the U.S. lost 7 percent or 142,000 of its farms from 2017 to 2022.

The ag census shows total land in farming in Idaho dropped from 11.69 million acres in 2017 to 11.55 million acres in 2022. Nationwide, total land in farming dropped from 900 million acres to 880 million acres.

Although most of the farms lost in the state and nation during that five-year period were small farms, it’s still not a good trajectory. And we mourn the loss of any farm or ranch, regardless of its size.

That’s why Idaho Farm Bureau Federation continues to work with other organizations to try to find a solution or solutions to help slow the loss of farms and farmland in Idaho.

[These are just a few of the highlights from the 2022 ag census. See pages 4 and 9

for more data highlights from the report.]

The census of ag is conducted nationally every five years and its data is widely used by companies, farmers and the groups that represent them, as well as by the federal government to provide programs that serve producers.

The ag census contains a host of data about American agriculture and is the only official source of this type of data in the United States. It contains millions of data points and is the only source of uniform, comprehensive and impartial agriculture data for every county and state in the nation.

Kudos to the 61.3 percent of agricultural producers in the state who filled out the ag census survey this time around.

Good, bad or ugly, the Census of Agriculture tells the story of American agriculture over the years. ■

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

Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins



"What a waste for opposable thumbs!"



"Another bumper crop, and believe me, I felt every bump."

Quick Snapshots Of Idaho Commodities - New Ag Census



The Ag Census is one of the most comprehensive looks at commodity data, including products grown and raised in Idaho. To save our members time from reading the entire 757 pages of the report, we have extracted Idaho-specific commodity data and simplified it into a short synopsis.

Some sections include commodity inventory, including the number of farms on which the commodity is grown. Other commodities also include dollar value and comparison to the previous ag census conducted in 2017.

Although the official data was released in 2024, the survey process was conducted in 2022. Indications of an upward or downward trend are specific to a five-year gap between 2017 and 2022.

Not every commodity and subsection is included in these pages. We have included a link to the full report at the end of this section.

All Goats

Inventory is 24,780 on 1,474 farms with a sales value of \$2,403,000

Milk Goats

Inventory is 7,373 on 547 farms with a sales value of \$762,000

Angora Goats

Inventory is 763 on 122 farms



Meat Goats & Other Goats

Inventory is 16,644 on 978 farms with a sales value of \$1,626,000

Ag In IDAHO

New Census

Horses & Ponies

Inventory is 41,412 on 6,660 farms with a sales value of \$12,750,000



Emus

Inventory is 99 on 25 farms

Guineas

Inventory is 946 on 142 farms with a sales value of \$93,000

Pheasants

Inventory is 28,359 on 21 farms



Trout

29 farms with a sales value of \$56,475,000

Quail

Inventory is 2,872 on 48 farms

Mules, Burros, & Donkeys

Inventory is 2,716 on 903 farms with a sales value of \$201,000



Honey Bees

Inventory is 154,589 on 669 farms with a sales value of \$13,793,000

Peacocks Or Peahens

Inventory is 651 on 88 farms

Pigeons or Squab

Inventory is 1,682 on 36 farms



Roosters

Inventory is 13,688 on 503 farms

Geese

Inventory is 589 on 137 farms with a sales value of \$121,000

Alpacas

Inventory is 1,304 on 127 farms with a sales value of \$129,000



ChickPeas, All (CWT)

Harvest 61,066 acres on 146 farms with a quantity of 828,426 CWT
Quantity compared to 2017 Down 45%

Rabbits, Live

Inventory is 1,381 on 80 farms with a sales value of \$38,000

Barley For Grain (Bushels)

Harvest 538,586 acres on 1,322 farms with a quantity of 50,782,418 bushels
Quantity compared to 2017 Up 1%



Corn For Grain (Bushel)

Harvest 126,508 acres on 648 farms with a quantity of 22,937,258 bushels
Quantity compared to 2017 Down 18%

Bison

Inventory is 5,361 on 42 farms with a sales value of \$2,418,000



Llamas

Inventory is 735 on 125 farms with a sales value of \$31,000

Austrian Peas (CWT)

Harvest 2,954 acres on 25 farms with a quantity of 37,080 CWT
Quantity compared to 2017 Up 65%



Canola (Pounds)

Harvest 60,905 acres on 179 farms with a quantity of 100,727,242 lbs
Quantity compared to 2017 Up 170%



Beef Cows

Inventory is 449,249 on 7,379 farms
cows compared to 2017 Down 10%
farms compared to 2017 Down 9%

Dry Edible Beans, Excluding Chickpeas & Lima (CWT)

Harvest 35,063 acres on 227 farms with a quantity of 868,671 CWT
Quantity compared to 2017 Down 51%

Dry Edible Peas (CWT)

Harvest 27,382 acres on 155 farms
with a quantity of 582,714 CWT
Quantity compared to 2017 Up 103%

Mustard Seed (Pounds)

Harvest 17,040 acres on 50 farms
with a quantity of 14,786,665 lbs
Quantity compared to 2017 Up 40%

Safflower (Pounds)

Harvest 22,893 acres on 40 farms with
a quantity of 13,294,641 lbs
Quantity compared to 2017 Down 19%

Triticale For Grain (Bushels)

Harvest 2,418 acres on 26 farms with
a quantity of 211,543 bushels
Quantity compared to 2017 Up 63%

Milk Cows

Inventory is 664,479 on 549 farms
#cows compared to 2017 Up 10%
farms compared to 2017 Down 30%

Alfalfa Seed (Pounds)

Harvest 13,127 acres on 69 farms with
a quantity of 8,860,701 lbs
Quantity compared to 2017 Down 63%

Corn For Silage Or Greenchop (Tons)

Harvest 258,326 acres on 772 farms
with a quantity of 7,412,427 tons
Quantity compared to 2017 Down 8%

Ag In IDAHO
New Census



Lentil (CWT)

Harvest 13,727 acres on 54 farms
with a quantity of 87,860 CWT
Quantity compared to 2017 Down
74%

Oats For Grain (Bushels)

Harvest 11,088 acres on 115 farms
with a quantity of 704,503 bushels
Quantity compared to 2017 Up 7%

Sugarbeets For Sugar (Tons)

Harvest 178,358 acres on 452 farms
with a quantity of 6,570,132 tons
Quantity compared to 2017 Up 1%



Wheat For Grain (Bushels)

Harvest 1,162,597 acres on 2,210 farms
with a quantity of 93,723,621 bushels
Quantity compared to 2017 Even

Other Spring Wheat For Grain (Bushels)

Harvest 356,898 acres on 918 farms
with a quantity of 25,659,376 bushels
Quantity compared to 2017 Down 26%



Potatoes

Harvest 301,157 acres on 529 farms
Acres compared to 2017 Down 10%



Hops (Pounds)

Harvest 9,785 acres on 16 farms with a
quantity of 16,375,200 lbs
Quantity compared to 2017 Down 18%

Onions, Dry

Harvest 14,522 acres on 201 farms
Acres compared to 2017 Up 17%

Sweet Corn

Harvest 3,282 acres on 221 farms
Acres compared to 2017 Up 55%

Mint For Oil, All (Pounds Of Oil)

Harvest 13,955 acres on 100 farms with
a quantity of 1,602,557 lbs
Quantity compared to 2017 Down 28%



Tomatoes In The Open

Harvest 62 acres on 215 farms
Acres compared to 2017 Down 14%



Corn For Silage Or Greenchop (Tons)

Harvest 258,326 acres on 772 farms
with a quantity of 7,412,427 tons
Quantity compared to 2017 Down 8%

Forage – Land Used For All Hay and Haylage, Grass Silage, And Greenchop (Tons, Dry Equivalent)

Harvest 1,415,865 acres on 10,279 farms with a quantity of 5,361,120 tons
Quantity compared to 2017 Down 8%

Land Used For Vegetables & Vegetables Harvested For Sale

Harvest 334,276 acres on 1,235 farms
Acres compared to 2017 Down 5%

Ag In IDAHO
New Census



Hay – All Hay, Including Alfalfa And Other Dry Hay (Tons, Dry)

Harvest 1,298,726 acres on 9,537 farms
with a quantity of 4,508,667 tons
Quantity compared to 2017 Down 14%

Alfalfa Hay (Tons, Dry)

Harvest 1,047,568 acres on 7,480 farms
with a quantity of 3,926,331 CWT
Quantity compared to 2017 Down 14%

Beans, Snap (Bush And Pole)

Harvest 5237 acres on 195 farms
Acres compared to 2017 Up 683%

Watermelons

Harvest 108 acres on 74 farms
Acres compared to 2017 Down 19%

Ag In IDAHO
New Census

Apples

Harvest 1,936 acres on 42 farms
Acres compared to 2017 Down 14%



Cherries

Harvest 624 acres on 149 farms
Acres compared to 2017 Up 9%

Fruit, Noncitrus, All

Harvest 5,483 acres on 554 farms
Acres compared to 2017 Down 3%

Peaches, All

Harvest 1,009 acres on 132 farms
Acres compared to 2017 Up 10%

Land In Berries

Harvest 207 acres on 268 farms
Acres compared to 2017 Down 15%

Christmas Trees

Harvest 746 acres on 101 farms
Acres compared to 2017 Up 2%



Land In Orchards

Harvest 5,523 acres on 567 farms
Acres compared to 2017 Down 3%



Classified Young Producers

3,859 young producers having 2,826 farms working on 1,468,931 acres

Classified New & Beginning Producers

14,798 new and beginning producers on 8,702 farms working on 2,736,291 acres

Access Full Report



All Farms

22,877 Farms

Land In Farms (Acres)

11,547,963 acres

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IF YOU RAISE ANIMALS ON THE ISLAND OF KODIAK (ALASKA), IT COMES AS NO SURPRISE TO SEE A HOG, COW, OR HORSE GET BROUGHT IN BY PLANE OR FERRY. KELLI FOREMAN, ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT KODIAK BAPTIST MISSION, TOOK EVERYTHING SHE LEARNED FROM HER UPBRINGING IN NEBRASKA TO BE A GOAT FARMER WHILE RAISING A FAMILY IN THIS UNIQUE PART OF THE COUNTRY. WITH THREE BOYS AND A WHOLE SLEW OF FARM ANIMALS TO RAISE, IT'S NO WONDER HER DAYS START WHEN THE REST OF US ARE STILL IN BED.



Chaos at shipping chokepoints

By **Betty Resnick**
Economist, AFBB

An estimated 80% of world trade is transported via ship. Maritime trade is most vulnerable to disruption at a series of geographic chokepoints across the globe (Figure 1). Some chokepoints are human-built canals, which provide extremely valuable shortcuts to connect the world's oceans, and others are naturally narrow points between bodies of water. In recent months, water level issues at the Panama Canal and attacks by Houthi rebels in the Red Sea, specifically around Bab el-Mandeb, have severely limited trade through two of the world's most important passages. This Market Intel does a deep dive on these twin issues, which have compounded to create major headaches for global trade.

Water Woes at the Panama Canal

The Panama Canal connects the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and is the most important chokepoint for U.S. trade, with approximately 14% of all U.S. maritime trade transiting through the canal. In fiscal year (FY) 2023, 72.2% of cargo by weight transiting the Panama Canal was either originating from or destined for the United States. As a significant portion of bulk U.S. agricultural exports are shipped down the Mississippi River, through the Gulf of Mexico and on to East Asia, the Panama Canal is an essential transit point for U.S. agricultural products.

In fiscal year/marketing year 2023, roughly 91% of U.S. sorghum exports, 29% of U.S. soybean exports and 18% of U.S. corn

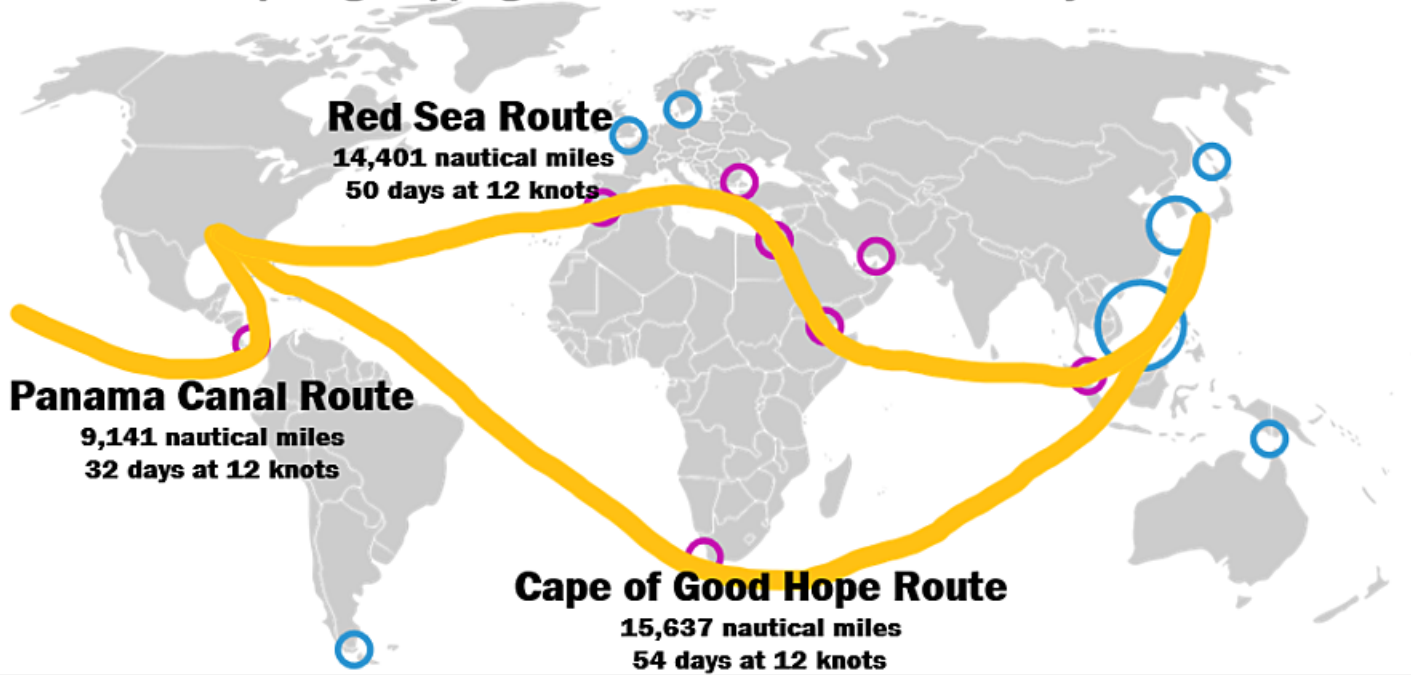
exports transited through the Panama Canal (calculated using Panama Canal Authority data for Atlantic to Pacific cargo (October 2022 – September 2023) and USDA Production, Supply and Distribution export data (September 2022 – August 2023)). Figure 2 illustrates why this is such a popular route. For goods being shipped from New Orleans to Tokyo, the Panama Canal route is 57% shorter in terms of distance than going through the Red Sea and 71% shorter than going around the Cape of Good Hope. At an average of 12 knots (without delays), the Red Sea route takes an extra 18 days on the water as compared to the Panama Canal route, and the Cape of Good Hope route takes an additional 22 days. Time is money when it comes to transit – with each additional day requiring extra fuel costs, crew and labor wages, and tying up cargo space generally, which all drive up costs for ag exporters. For these reasons, in the latter half of October 2022, a period when maritime trade was running smoothly, 80% of grain exports headed out of the U.S. Gulf to East Asia were transported via the Panama Canal (USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Grain Transportation Report, Nov. 23, 2023).

Now that the importance of the Panama Canal is established, we must dive into how and why low water levels are limiting exports through the canal. In a typical year, Panama's rainy season lasts from approximately May through November. Due to impacts from El Niño, a climate phenomenon of unusually warm surface waters in the Pacific Ocean that disrupts typical global weather patterns, 2023 was the second-driest year in the Panama Canal

FIGURE 1: Global Chokepoints for Maritime Trade



FIGURE 2 Comparing Shipping Routes from New Orleans to Tokyo



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Recreation of Graphic from USDA AMS Grain Transportation Report, November 23, 2023

watershed in recorded history. Lake Gatun is the primary water source for both the Panama Canal and drinking water for a majority of the country's population. As Panama essentially did not have its rainy season in 2023, as of January 2024, when the lake is typically at its peak water level, the level was at the ninth-lowest low in the past 60 years.

Operating the Panama Canal takes an immense amount of fresh water. For each transit through the canal, it takes an average of 52 million gallons of fresh water, or roughly 80 Olympic-sized swimming pools. Due to this unprecedented water shortage, the Panama Canal Authority has had to take unprecedented action. At the end of July 2023, the Panama Canal Authority started dramatically decreasing the number of daily transits allowed, settling at a reduction of 33% from 36 to 24 daily transits since January 2024 (Figure 4). The daily transit restrictions are in addition to limits on draft height, which also severely restrict the amount of cargo the canal can move, a familiar problem to farmers due to low Mississippi River levels in recent years. Additional water saving techniques such as cross filling the original locks have reduced the amount of water in an average transit by 45% to 28 million gallons. New, larger locks opened in 2016 also move cargo more efficiently – allowing double the amount of cargo as the original locks while recycling 60% of the water used.

In response, Maersk, the world's largest shipper, has switched container shipments between Oceania and the Americas to utilize the Panama Canal Railway instead of the Panama Canal. This means they are unloading ships on one side of Panama, putting them on an 80-kilometer rail line that runs parallel to the canal, then reloading them on ships on the other side, a slow and costly endeavor. This is not feasible for dry bulk, which is how grains

and other bulk agricultural commodities are shipped, making the impacts on agricultural goods more severe. This caused U.S. grain exporters (Gulf to East Asia) to shift from going through the Panama Canal to transiting the Red Sea. By the last half of October 2023, 91% of grain exports from the U.S. Gulf to East Asia were headed through the Red Sea and only 9% went through the Panama Canal. By the second half of November, no U.S. bulk grain vessels were transiting from the U.S. Gulf to East Asia via the Panama Canal. Instead, 15 of the 16 vessels went through the Red Sea, and one around the Cape of Good Hope.

So, what is next for the Panama Canal? In the long-term, the Panama Canal Authority is considering building an additional reservoir to source fresh water for the canal and will invest \$2 billion in water management improvements. In the short term, water-saving measures will continue to stay in place until water levels improve – which will not likely come until rains return late this spring.

Conflict in the Red Sea

Like the Panama Canal, the Red Sea accounts for a massive amount of global shipping. White House estimates state that the Red Sea accounts for nearly 15% of all global maritime trade, 12% of global maritime oil trade, 8% of global grain trade, and 8% of global liquefied natural gas trade. Since mid-November, commercial shipping has been targeted by attacks from Houthi rebels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. The Houthis are a U.S.-designated terrorist organization that controls a significant amount of territory within Yemen that borders the Bab el-Mandeb, the passage on the southern end of the Red Sea that is only 18 miles wide at its narrowest point.

The Houthis have been attacking commercial ships indiscriminately since mid-November, totaling at least 48 attacks as of Feb. 27. On Dec. 18, the U.S. and a coalition of many countries announced Operation Prosperity Guardian to focus on security in the Red Sea. The U.S. and its coalition partners have subsequently responded with a number of attacks on the Houthis and have continued to shoot down Houthi anti-ship cruise missiles and drones. As of Feb. 27, the U.S. has struck over 230 targets in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen.

While to date only a few ships have sustained serious damage, most notably a bulk carrier with tens of thousands of tons of fertilizer that is now at risk of sinking, marine war risk insurance premiums have increased significantly since the attacks began. High marine war risk insurance premiums are charged as a percentage of the overall value of the ship and its contents. Thus, the more expensive the ship and its contents – the more expensive it is to insure. For this reason, container ships, which may have cargo value reaching over a billion dollars, were some of the first to abandon the Red Sea as a route.

For ships containing less valuable cargo – including dry bulk ships carrying agricultural products – shipping companies are considering the cost of diverting around the Cape of Good Hope against the cost of increases in insurance. Let's say a dry bulk ship has a total insurable value of \$100 million. Prior to the attacks, they would pay a 0.02% insurance premium to transit the Red Sea – or \$20,000. Now that has jumped to upwards of 1% - or a cool \$1 million. That is, if insurers are willing to underwrite the ship at all – which several insurers are no longer willing to do with ships affiliated with the United States, United Kingdom or Israel, which the Houthis have vowed to target. Container ships are much more expensive, often in the range of \$250 million to \$500 million dollars – and thus were some of the first ships to begin avoiding

the Red Sea.

A comparison of cargo transiting the Suez Canal on Nov. 23 to the amount transiting on Jan. 24 shows that total bulk commodity shipping is down 31%, with most reductions starting in late December and decreasing further throughout January. Liquefied natural gas (75%) and liquefied petroleum gas (66%) are the most impacted, while dry bulk is also down 28%.

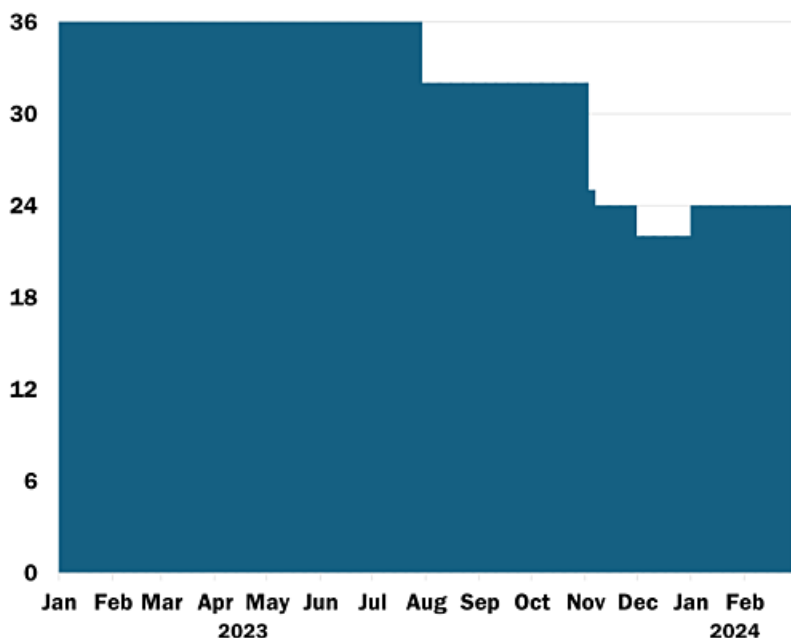
Ships transiting between Europe and Asia are the most affected, as going around the Cape of Good Hope can double their transit times. India is severely impacted, both from a trade perspective and because many maritime crews are from India, both of which are reflected in India's strong naval presence in the region.

At an informal public hearing on Wednesday, Feb. 7, Federal Maritime Commission (FMC) Chair Daniel Maffai characterized current conditions in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden as the “biggest impingement on freedom of the seas in decades.” Witnesses affiliated with the agricultural sector included representatives from the Agriculture Transportation Coalition and the USA Dry Pea & Lentil Council/the American Pulse Association. Pulses include dry peas, beans, lentils and chickpeas.

During the hearing, both representatives from agricultural organizations emphasized that some of the largest impacts on agriculture include the uncertainty on whether ships can make it to destinations in the Middle East, stating that while 20-30% price increases are not sustainable for the shipper – it's even less sustainable if the cargo can't make it to where you want it to go.

Food aid, which in addition to feeding the world's most vulnerable people is an important export avenue for U.S. pulses, has been particularly impacted with shipments to destinations on the Red Sea grinding to a stop. According to the testimony, Djibouti, an important port destination for food aid to the region that sits opposite Yemen on the Bab el-Mandeb, is unable to receive many

FIGURE 4: Panama Canal, Number of Daily Transits



Daily transits are down 33% in 2024

imports. The lack of food aid inflows threatens to further destabilize the region, which has multiple areas in Ethiopia and Sudan on the brink of famine.

At the FMC hearing, worries abounded on whether U.S. West Coast ports are prepared to handle great inflows of cargo volume as ships rapidly switch from the East to West Coast. Many witnesses pointed to mid-March as when congestion in some U.S. ports will increase and a potential lack of containers and equipment availability will occur.

Compounding Complications

It is hard to overstate how the impacts of the water shortages at the Panama Canal and the Houthi attacks in the Red Sea compound and amplify each other. To understand the impacts a bit better, we can compare the shipment routes of U.S. grain exports between the U.S. Gulf and East Asia at various points in time. In the latter half of October 2022, when the Panama Canal was operating at full capacity, 83% of bulk grain vessels traveling between the U.S. Gulf and East Asia traveled through the Panama Canal and the rest went through the Red Sea. During the same timeframe one year later this figure had flipped, with 87% of the ships going through the Red Sea. By late November 2023, nearly all bulk grain ships were traveling through the Red Sea because of the reduced capacity at the Panama Canal. By the last half of December – when Houthi attacks in the Red Sea had escalated – 69% of ships were going through the Cape of Good Hope, 19% through the Red Sea, and only 13% through the Panama Canal. The percentage going through the Cape of Good Hope likely escalated as we entered 2024 and attacks against commercial ships have continued relentlessly.

For a more international perspective, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development published an analysis of

current impacts on trade stemming from the disruptions in the Red Sea, Black Sea and Panama Canal.

Conclusions

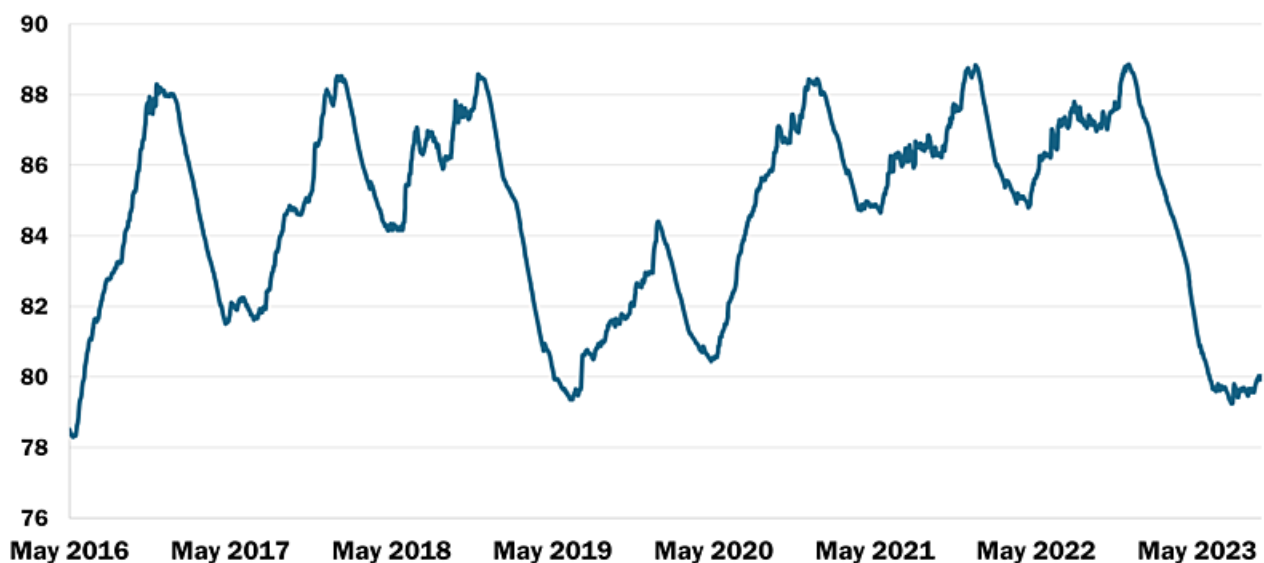
The crisis at the Panama Canal and in the Red Sea/Gulf of Aden are like fraternal twins. While not identical, together they double the trouble. The water shortages at the Panama Canal are reminiscent of recent year's low Mississippi River levels and could become a recurring problem. In the medium-term, it should be resolved in April or May with the return of the rainy season in Panama.

The challenges in the Middle East present a problem with little end in sight. Even if the U.S. and its allies are able to eliminate the Houthi's ability to harm commercial vessels – the problem of cheap drones and missiles are not going away. If not the Houthis themselves, future groups now have a blueprint on how to cause global supply chain issues with relatively low cost to themselves.

Agricultural products, even high-quality U.S. goods, are fundamentally a fungible commodity – meaning they are replaceable or mutually interchangeable. While U.S. agricultural products are less harmed than those from Europe, Brazilian exports are less harmed than U.S. products. As U.S. producers have seen competition with Brazilian farmers in international markets increase in recent years, these trade route complications are particularly ill-timed. In a small silver lining, even as this chaos continues, supply chains are more resilient now in a post-COVID world and cargo costs are nowhere near COVID-related highs. Lessons learned from COVID, and additional cargo capacity that is coming online from COVID-timed boat building decisions, will continue to diminish the impact of these issues. However, at the end of the day, any increases to the cost of trade will trickle down to farmer's pocketbooks in terms of reduced demand for U.S. commodities (i.e., lower prices) or increased cost of inputs, such as fertilizer. ■

FIGURE 3: Lake Gatun – Water Level

Primary Water Source for the Panama Canal



Importance of the Mycorrhizae Membrane

by PAUL SCHNEIDER JR., AG-USA

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Mycorrhizal fungi are far more important than most farmers have imagined.

The mycorrhizal fungi membrane

With suitable conditions, mycorrhizal fungi will form a membrane between the plant and soil. This membrane gives the plant the ability to select the nutrients it takes up, plus the ability to leave behind or even exclude toxic ions like aluminum, cadmium and lead.

The surface area of this fungal membrane can become enormous, developing as much as 500 miles of fungal hyphae in a single cubic foot of soil. The more complex it becomes, the greater the health and vitality of the plant.

When one uses herbicides, pesticides, nematicides or fungicides, when one applies excessive fertilizer and does excessive soil cultivation, it kills off helpful fungi. In reality, most farm land doesn't contain very much mycorrhizae. In their absence, plants must rely exclusively on their roots to take up nutrients. This isn't good, because most plants were designed to need the help of fungi.

A plant's root system has a 1,000th the surface area of a fungi membrane. Without the help of fungi, nutrient uptake sometimes decreases by 70% or more. We need greater nutrient uptake in our food to avoid chronic, diet-related diseases like Alzheimer's, cancer, heart disease and immunological diseases.



Hydroponically functioning soil

Soils are often toxic, and most soils are out of balance. Without a mycorrhizal fungi membrane, plant roots are left to function hydroponically. They simply suck up water from the soil with whatever soluble anions are present in the solution, like nitrates, sulfates and potassium. They also suck up toxic ions like aluminum, cadmium, and lead.

Without the help of the mycorrhizae membrane, plants are only capable of taking up very low levels of essential positively charged cations. This totally compromises the nutritional integrity of what is grown. Nutrient-deficient plants are much more prone to disease and insect attack.

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An Extraordinary Equine

Robust indomitable White Horse still thrives in solitude of scenic valley

By Dianna Troyer

Was the renowned White Horse surviving yet another central Idaho winter in a scenic high altitude valley, living in solitude?

Adjusting his spotting scope on a sunny morning in late January, Warren Trogden focused on a snowy 6,000-foot-high hillside dotted with sagebrush. The Challis resident hoped to see the extraordinary horse he has been watching for nearly three decades in the Lost River Valley.

He noticed movement, fine-tuned the scope, and was relieved. There he was – the White Horse of Black Daisy Canyon, looking over his right shoulder, occasionally grazing on the dry yellowed grasses that wind had blown clear of snow near the Mackay Reservoir.

The robust compact gelding in his late 20s or early 30s has inspired admirers statewide who cherish him as a symbol of rugged western individualism, self-reliance, and freedom. Nearby residents -- content to admire him from afar -- respect his privacy and leave him alone to live a solitary lifestyle. During the past two decades, they have watched him turn from a dark dapple gray as a youngster to white, a natural progression of his genetic coloring.

While his specific origins are uncertain, locals say the gelding wandered away from a hunting camp in nearby Copper Basin. His owners searched but were unable to find him. Eventually, he rubbed off remnants of civilization -- a halter, hobbles, pack saddle, and a bell dangling on a leather strap around his neck.

After two musicians and an artist read an article about the exceptional equine in the November 2022 issue of "Gem State Producer," they were inspired to write a ballad and paint his portrait.

Trogden said he has seen the white horse several times a year since 1995 when he started working for the Bureau of Land Management as an equipment operator and maintenance worker.

For 28 years, he routinely worked at the bureau's campground on the east shore of the reservoir and "set up my spotting scope to glass for him. A co-worker told me about him during my first

season. Some campers come every year just to look for him. He always seems relaxed, grazing and looking around."

Trogden still goes to the reservoir to look for him since retiring from the BLM in the fall of 2023.

"I'm always relieved to see him and amazed he has lived this long. One winter day, I didn't see him but saw a pack of coyotes running around and thought, 'Oh, no.' But he's still there. We have a lot of predators here – wolves and mountain lions – but somehow he survives."

To locals, he's simply the White Horse while some out-of-area campers call him the Spirit Horse or the Ghost Horse, a mythic figure thought to bring good luck to those fortunate enough to see him.

"During winter, he turns kind of a damp gray color," Trogden said.

Fortunately, this winter was milder than the winter of 2022 to 2023 when deep snow covered the ground from fall to spring and temperatures plummeted to well below zero.

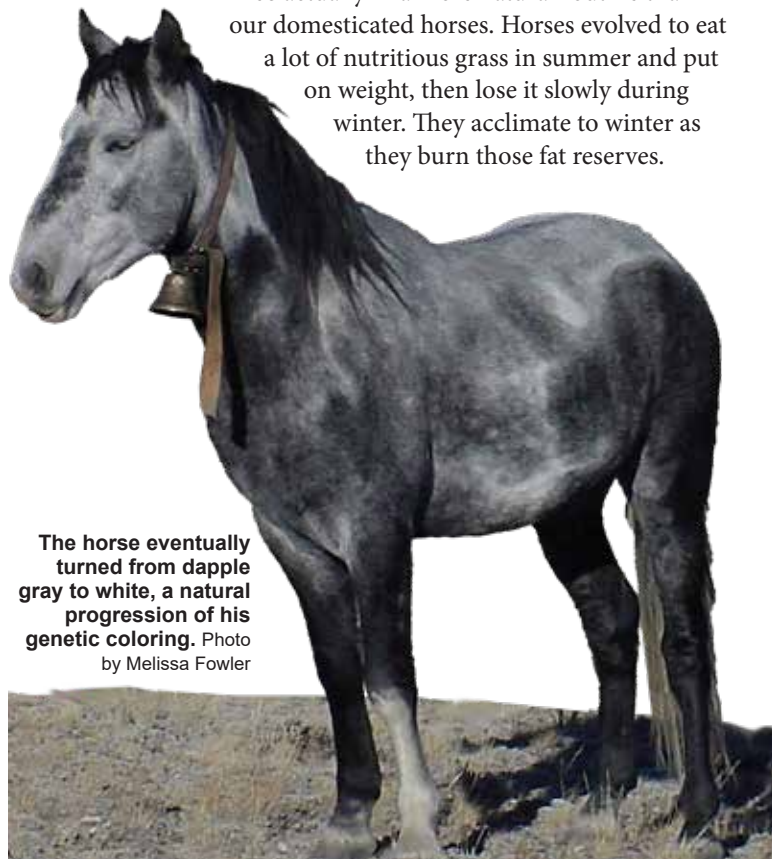
"During 2023, the winter was so tough that even some of the wild horses didn't make it," Trogden said of horses in the BLM's Challis Herd Management Area.

Surviving winter of '22-'23

While the White Horse's hardiness astounds his devotees, a local veterinarian said equines have evolved to thrive in such conditions.

"Horses have an incredibly efficient digestive system that produces heat to get them through winter," said Dr. Jeff Bennetts, owner of Lone Pine Animal Hospital in Challis about 50 miles north of Mackay. During summers, he has seen the White Horse grazing near the reservoir.

"He's actually in a more natural routine than our domesticated horses. Horses evolved to eat a lot of nutritious grass in summer and put on weight, then lose it slowly during winter. They acclimate to winter as they burn those fat reserves.



The horse eventually turned from dapple gray to white, a natural progression of his genetic coloring. Photo by Melissa Fowler

It's more normal than us feeding our horses year-round. He stays hydrated by eating snow.”

As far as predators are concerned, “Horses are very capable of defending themselves by kicking and biting,” he said. “From talking to some cowboys who have cattle in the area and see him, he's really skittish and runs from whatever he perceives as a threat. The thing that will eventually weaken him is that his teeth will wear down as he ages, and he'll have a hard time grinding his forage.”

A longtime Mackay resident and horse owner who has seen the White Horse several times, Barbara Harp recalls the severity of last winter and marvels at the horse's endurance and longevity.

“Usually in the fall, the snow comes in late October, then melts so the grass is showing, then it snows more. But during the winter of '23, the snow never melted and there were several nights when it was 40 below—and that was without the wind chill. I wonder if he spends winter along the river bottom where there's shelter and grass. It's amazing he's still here. When I saw him last spring, he'd lost a lot of weight.”

Harp has photographed him several years in May near her home high on a rocky ridge. “He likes to stand there in the spring and soak up the sunshine and warmth.”

Last summer, the White Horse regained the weight lost from the previous winter and by fall looked healthy.

“Every spring, I'm cautiously optimistic that he'll be back,” Harp said.

Artistic and musical inspiration

When she learned about the White Horse, Caldwell artist Kayla Cuellar was inspired to paint an impressionistic watercolor of him with the bell that once dangled around his neck lying on the ground at his front hooves.

“To me, his story is that he's free and living on his own terms, so I wanted the painting to be abstract, loose, and free while also conveying his strength and independence,” Cuellar said. “He doesn't fit in anyone's box or live up to others' expectations to be part of a herd. He reminds me of my uncle who had a similar mindset and worked as a game warden in the Lost River Valley years ago.”

In December, Cuellar was asked to paint the horse after meeting musicians Bruce Michael Miller and Heather Platts, known as Crazy Love Duo. They had written a ballad, “The White Horse of Black Daisy Canyon,” and were performing it and other songs for a private party in Caldwell where Cuellar's paintings were exhibited.

After the party, the Twin Falls musicians asked her to paint the horse for their “Idaho Originals” program, a musical and literary travelogue funded through an Idaho Arts Council grant. The grant enabled Miller and Platts to write eight original songs about unique features of Idaho and to publish an accompanying book with photos and artwork for each song.

Accepting their invitation, Cuellar listened several times to their song on YouTube and read about the horse on the internet where she found several photos.

“I had always wanted to do a horse painting – mostly for myself – and him living outside the box resonated with me,” she said.



Photo courtesy of Kayla Cuellar

Caldwell artist Kayla Cuellar was inspired to paint a 14-inch-square watercolor of the White Horse after listening to a ballad, “The White Horse of Black Daisy Canyon,” by Crazy Love Duo musicians Bruce Michael Miller and Heather Platts of Twin Falls.

“We'll never know his complete story.”

After she finished her painting in January, Cuellar named it “Spirit of Lost River Valley.”

“While this horse is alone, he isn't sad,” she said. “He's free, which brings him joy. To me, the horse and song are stunning reminders to passionately live our God-designed purpose -- breaking free of human expectations and stepping into our personal story to become who we were created to be with confidence and courage.”

Through the ballad and painting, the White Horse will take a vicarious voyage with Crazy Love Duo during their statewide “Idaho Originals” tour. Their album release concert was April 19 at the Twin Falls Center for the Arts.

Miller and Platts said the story of the horse was an obvious song, one they were inspired to write after reading about him in “Gem State Producer” during breakfast.

“We each spontaneously went to our separate home offices and started writing “The White Horse of Black Daisy Canyon,” Miller recalled. “A few hours later, we realized we had been doing the same thing. Songs like that are a gift. The ideas – freedom, an underdog story, how he survives alone especially during harsh winters – it's fascinating. The song just came about organically, like it wanted to be written and sung.”

Horse aficionados since childhood, they both avidly read Marguerite Henry's books about horses. “My first Breyer horse was a dapple gray like the early photos of the White Horse,” Platts said. “We've both always wanted to write a song about a horse, and he was perfect.”

Their final lyric resonates – “The White Horse of Black Daisy Canyon ... made his escape and captured our hearts.” ■

Another invasive grass for Idaho, potentially affecting forests

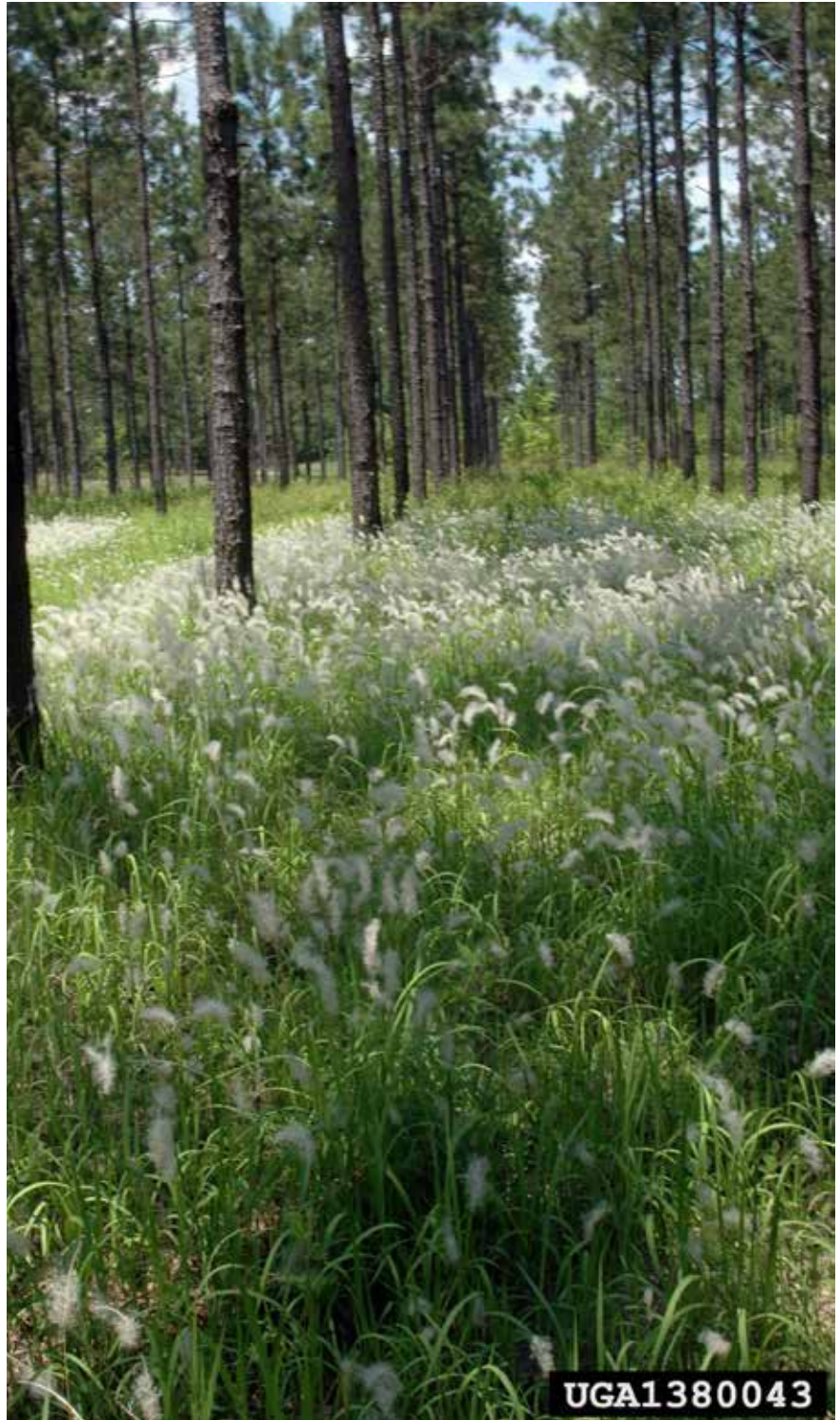
By Tim Prather
University of Idaho

An invasive perennial grass species was recently found in the Boise, ID area, called Cogongrass. Cogongrass has a scientific name, *Imperata cylindrica* (L.) Raeusch. Cogongrass has other names including Japanese bloodgrass and Red Baron grass. Normally found in tropical to subtropical regions, finding sustaining stands in Idaho seems surprising. It is native to Asia, Micronesia, Melanesia, Australia, Africa and Southern Europe.

There have been both accidental and intentional introductions of cogongrass, accidentally in Louisiana in 1912 and intentionally in Florida in the 1930's. Prior to its arrival in Idaho, it was found in the southeastern states as well as both Texas and Colorado. The Idaho State Department of Agriculture has listed cogongrass as a noxious weed using ISDA's temporary listing process.

The southeastern U.S. has experienced cogongrass infesting pine forests but also grasslands. An article in *Science*, August 4, 2022, discussed *Fiery Invasions Around the World*. Five grasses were detailed, including our familiar cheatgrass, and also included cogongrass. These grasses were considered among the most important grasses for wildfire risk across the globe—estimates from 2007 suggest over 1 million acres in Florida and thousands of acres across the southeastern states.

Cogongrass has underground stems (rhizomes) that send up additional stems and create uniform stands of grass that have increased fire frequency and severity in the southeast. Trees in Florida that were less than 3 feet high died at rates 30% to 50% higher in burned areas where cogongrass was present, contrasted to burn areas where it was not present. Additionally, measurement of fine fuels from invaded areas are 50% greater than areas



RIGHT: **Cogongrass creates uniform grass stands in tree understory.** Photo by Chris Evans, University of Illinois, Bugwood.org

UGA1380043



Photo by Charles T. Bryson, USDA Agricultural Research Service, Bugwood.org

Cogongrass is one of 5 grasses worldwide considered the worst fire hazards.

not invaded, so not only are fuels more uniform, they also have increased fine fuels.

Studies suggest fire stimulates flower production, and the grass seeds are light and easily travel in the wind. With wind dispersal, expansion of infestations should be greater than for our other invasive grasses (cheatgrass, ventenata).

Cogongrass is grazed in its native range. Nitrogen levels are lower and silica levels higher than one native group of wiregrasses (Aristida), suggesting forage quality is poor for both livestock and wildlife. If cogongrass proves adapted to our forests, we could see expansion of cogongrass after fire and reduced forage quality for both livestock and wildlife.

A challenge for predicting the impacts of an invasive plant species in a new area derives in part from an apples and oranges comparison.

We know it affects grasslands and forests in the southeast, but would that logically translate to our forests?

The answer is yes—we do have pines but different species; the timing of our precipitation is different; and we certainly get colder than much of the southeast. Invasive species come without the

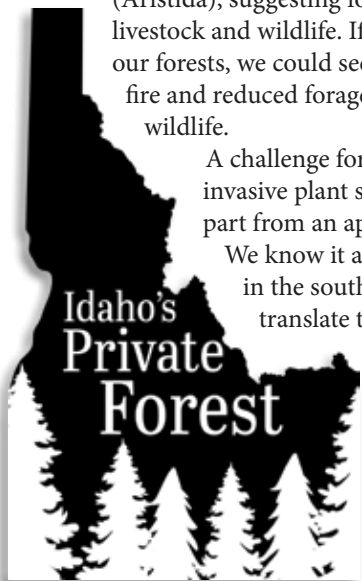
diseases and insects that affect them, so they may withstand some of the environmental limits that could be measured in their native habitat.

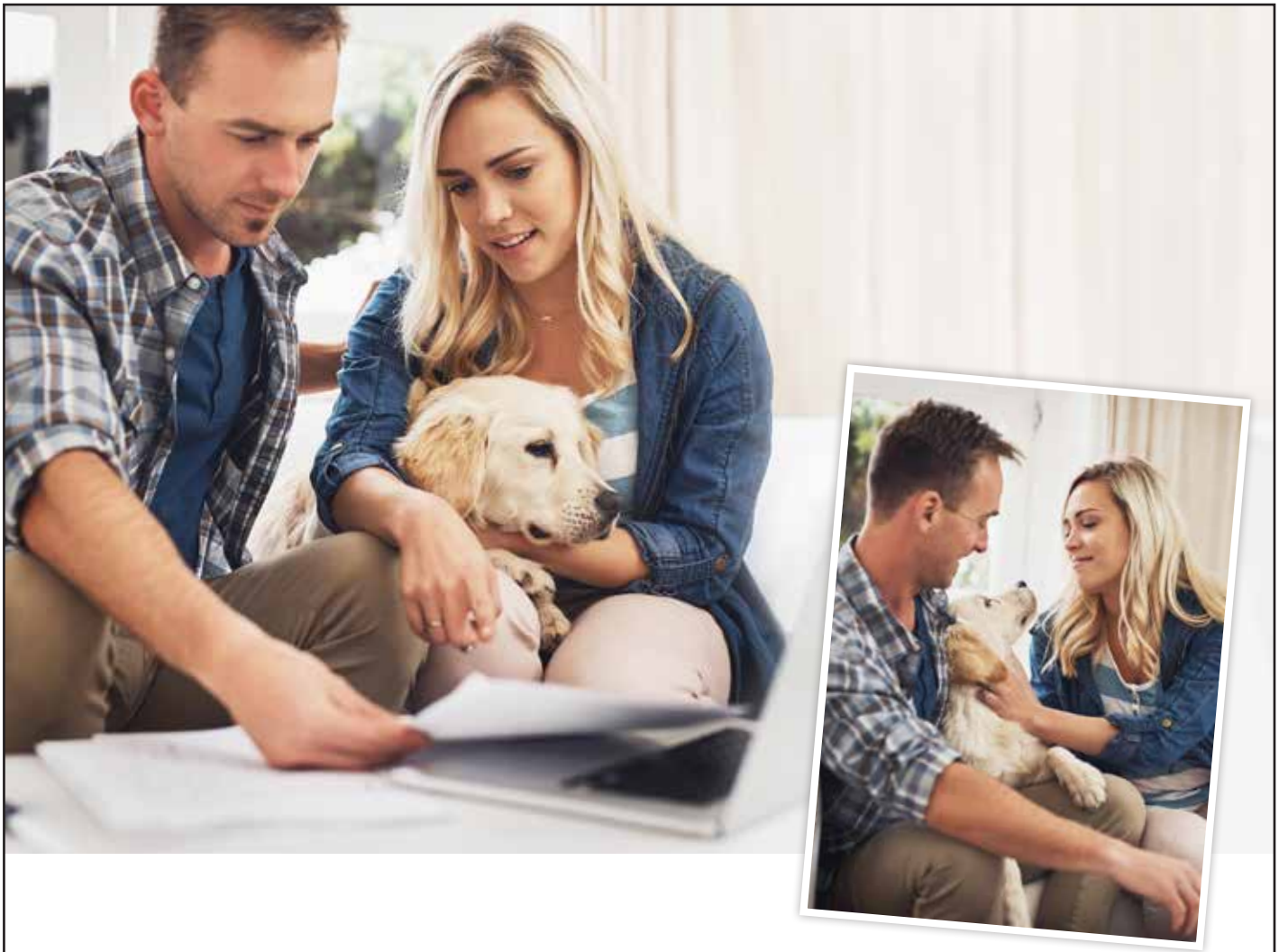
With ambiguity around actual impact in Idaho, we still must wrestle with the fact it is one of the top 5 grasses that cause fires worldwide. The distribution seems limited, making eradication feasible in Idaho. Eradication is complete removal of all plant parts, not to be confused with control. Eradication takes years to complete, but, when accomplished, has permanent long-term benefits of not having to deal with it.

Cogongrass does not flower all the time, so first look for leaf blades that can be 1 inch wide and up to 6 feet long. Usually there will be a white, thicker center vein in the leaf blade and the center vein might be slightly off center. It will be light green in color during the wetter season, turning reddish brown after a frost, with leaf margins of small teeth. The leaves appear to come up out of the ground or close to soil surface, so no tall main stem with leaves off the main stem.

When it does flower, the flowers are dense against the stem, and when seeds are mature, they have white hairs attached to the seeds that allow them to float on the wind. Digging up some cogongrass should reveal the rhizomes where new leaves are formed. The rhizomes allow for dense grass stands. ■

Tim Prather is a professor in the Plant Sciences Department at the University of Idaho. He also is senior associate director of the UI Rangeland Center.





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Addressing Constituent Concerns New Chemigation Bill

In a legislative session marked by the introduction of a record number of bills, a new piece of legislation will help Idaho's chemigators.

Chemigation, the practice of applying pesticides and fertilizers through irrigation systems, has long been a critical component of Idaho farming operations. Representative Melissa Durrant recognized a need for reform within Idaho's chemigation regulations and took action.

It all began with a concern from a constituent regarding the regulatory requirements around chemigation licensing. The chemigation law at the time required all chemigators to obtain a pesticide applicators license whether they were applying pesticides or fertilizer.

Collaborating with the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA), Durrant developed House Bill 549, aiming to simplify the licensing process for chemigators.

Durrant's legislation reduces the burden for obtaining a license by offering chemigators an option to attend an ISDA training, either in person or online, rather than having to mirror the applicator licensing process and exams. This streamlined approach reduces paperwork and regulatory burden while still ensuring that chemigators are adequately trained and informed. ISDA chemigation inspections will continue to be performed with the intention of supporting industry in compliance.

Durrant carried House Bill 549 through the House. On the Senate side, Senator Todd Lakey organized support for the bill, recognizing the importance of addressing the needs of their district's agricultural community. The new legislation was signed into effect by the Governor and went into effect on March 19, 2024. ISDA is implementing a temporary rule to ensure these changes are in place for the 2024 growing season.



Representative Melissa Durrant, District 23

"I hope customers feel comfortable coming to us with concerns, and I'm grateful for legislators who do the same," said Chanel Tewalt, ISDA Director. "A practice being in place for several years does not inhibit us from reevaluating its efficacy for industry. I want industry and policymakers to feel comfortable having conversations with us about how to better serve Idaho agriculture."



Photos by Sean Ellis

A couple hundred people attended the 2024 Larry Branen Idaho Ag Summit Feb. 20 in Boise. The theme of this year's summit was, "Seeds of Change: Navigating the Future of Idaho Agriculture."

Several receive awards during Idaho Ag Summit

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE – During this year's Idaho Ag Summit, guest speaker Luther Markwart said this is one of the most exciting times to be in agriculture.

But he also said the world is changing rapidly because of technology and farmers and ranchers need to be ready to change as well if necessary.

"In any single moment, things can change dramatically, and you have to adapt ... and figure out how to navigate," said Markwart, executive director of the American Sugarbeet Growers Association.

The theme of the 2024 Larry Branen Idaho Ag Summit, held Jan. 20 in Boise, was, "Seeds of Change: Navigating the Future of Idaho Agriculture."

The annual summit attracts a couple hundred farmers, ranch-

“We produce a lot of potatoes and cattle and cheese and dairy and yogurt and sugar, but the most important crop we produce in Idaho is young farmers and ranchers and this is a tribute to that.”

– Brad Little, Gov. of Idaho

ers, agribusiness representatives and other leaders of Idaho’s agricultural industry.

“When I look at this room, I see living seeds,” Markwart said. “Your voices, your knowledge, your experience is incredibly important.”

With all the challenges facing the U.S. agriculture industry right now, from fast-changing technology to government regulations to lawsuits and the need for a new farm bill, agricultural producers need to be engaged and now is not the time to be shy, he said.

“Sitting on our hands is not an option,” said Markwart, who was raised on a family dairy farm in Michigan and has been a leader and advocate for the sugar beet industry for more than 40 years. “You feed people. That’s kind of important.”

Pat Takasugi Leadership Award

During the Ag Summit, Glenn Shewmaker, a former Extension forage specialist with University of Idaho, was presented with the Pat Takasugi Leadership Award, which is named after the late director of the Idaho State Department of Agriculture and given to someone who has shown strong leadership for Idaho agriculture.

During his tenure with U of I, Shewmaker was located at the Kimberly Research and Extension Center and authored 21 scientific papers, two books, 23 book chapters, 25 peer-reviewed articles, 138 proceedings and popular press articles, said Will Ricks, president of the Idaho Hay and Forage Association.

Shewmaker was raised on an irrigated row crop and forage farm near Kimberly and is still involved with the family’s farm.

Ricks said Shewmaker has played a cooperative role with the Idaho Hay and Forage Association through the years in coordinating the educational portion of the group’s annual meeting for producers and is frequently asked to speak at state and regional programs related to his expertise in hay and forage production.

Five people received Governor’s Awards for Excellence in Agriculture during the summit. These awards recognize people for their contributions to Idaho’s agriculture industry.

Videos highlighting their contributions were shown before the awards were presented.

“You cannot honor people of agriculture if you don’t see them in their native state,” said Gov. Brad Little, speaking about the videos.

“A common denominator in the videos is that there are a lot of families in those pictures,” said Little, a rancher and farmer from



TOP: Stan Boyd, center, receives a Governor’s Award for Excellence in Agriculture from Gov. Brad Little and Idaho Ag Summit co-chair Samantha Parrott.

ABOVE: Ron Griff, center, receives a Governor’s Award for Excellence in Agriculture on behalf of his son, Lance Griff, from Gov. Brad Little and Idaho Ag Summit co-chair Samantha Parrott.

Emmett. “As I always say, we produce a lot of potatoes and cattle and cheese and dairy and yogurt and sugar, but the most important crop we produce in Idaho is young farmers and ranchers and this is a tribute to that.”

Lifetime Achievement – Stanley T. Boyd

According to his award bio, since being hired as executive director of the Idaho Wool Growers Association in 1978, “Stan has devoted his life to Idaho agriculture.”

While serving as director of the wool growers, Boyd, who was raised on the family sheep ranch, also became secretary of the Idaho Sheep Commission and secretary of the Idaho State Predatory Board.

Within a few years, he also began lobbying for the Idaho Cattle Association, Idaho Horse Breeders Association, Idaho Elk Breeders Association and Idaho Horse Racing Association, as well as other organizations.

As general manager of the Rocky Mountain Sheep Marketing Association, Boyd is responsible for marketing and shipping more than 70,000 lambs in Idaho and surrounding states.

“Stan has a passion for all ag issues but especially for the sheep industry,” his bio states.

“It’s just been a real pleasure to work with family and friends over the years,” he said upon receiving the award.

Environmental Stewardship – Lance Griff

Griff, who pursued a degree in agriculture, science and technology at the University of Idaho, works full-time as a partner in Griff Farms, where he farms with his father and business partner.

The farm includes 3,800 acres of wheat, beans, corn and alfalfa on the Salmon Tract south of Twin Falls.

According to his award bio, 10 years after he began farming full-time, Griff began seeking a better way to use scarce water resources in the area and increase irrigation efficiency.

One solution he identified was no-till farming and the use of cover crops and in 2013 he began experimenting with cover crops to try to improve soil health and water efficiency.

According to his bio, he began to see extremely positive results from this practice and the use of cover crops has also led to the farm using less fuel, as well as reducing the chance for fertilizer to run off the field into water sources.

Griff has been recognized by several organizations for his innovative farming practices, according to his award bio.

“Lance thinks outside the box with an eye toward long-term sustainability, efficiency and profitability on the farm,” his bio states.

Griff’s parents, Ron and Janie Griff, received the award on his behalf because he was out of town that day.

Marketing Innovation – Jack Brown

Brown, a University of Idaho researcher, has been involved in developing superior genetic varieties of industrial, edible and condiment mustard and canola for a wide range of environments in the Pacific Northwest and around the world for more than 28 years, according to his award bio.

During his tenure as a plant breeder, geneticist, professor and department head of the Brassica Breeding and Research Program at the U of I, “Brown has worked hard to build up the reputation of the little-known, under-appreciated canola plant,” his bio states. “He was instrumental in developing many new varieties of canola, mustard and rapeseed.”

Under Brown’s direction, the university has played a key role in developing new uses of canola, rapeseed and mustard plants, his bio states. He also introduced the concept of planting canola early, foraging the crop for livestock and then harvesting the seed.

Canola yields have increased at least two-fold in the nearly three decades that Brown has worked on the plants, according to his bio.

“The best thing that ever happened to me in my lifetime was to come to the state of Idaho and to work at the University of Idaho,” he said after receiving his award.

Education/Advocacy – Cordell and Jamie Kress

“Cory” and Jamie Kress own and operate a dryland farm in the Rockland Valley of Power County in east Idaho. The family operation includes a crop rotation of winter wheat, safflower, mustard, dry peas and canola.



TOP: University of Idaho researcher Jack Brown, center, receives a Governor’s Award for Excellence in Agriculture from Gov. Brad Little and Idaho Ag Summit co-chair Samantha Parrott.

ABOVE: Cory and Jamie Kress, center, receive a Governor’s Award for Excellence in Agriculture from Gov. Brad Little and Idaho Ag Summit co-chair Samantha Parrott.

According to their award bio, “Cory and Jamie are actively involved in several boards and organizations, working with their leadership groups to make an impact that is meaningful to agriculture in Idaho.”

Cory has served on the Idaho Oilseed Commission and currently serves on the Idaho Wheat Commission. Jamie recently completed her role as president of the Idaho Grain Producers Association, serving as the first female president in the organization’s history.

“Cory and Jamie are both natural connectors; they know the importance of relationships in state and national agriculture and they work hard to build strong, poignant, sensible affiliations,” their award bio states.

“We love the opportunities that we’ve been given,” Jamie Kress said after they received their award. “We’re here for our friends. We’re here because we love agriculture and the people in the room matter so much to us....” ■



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LOAN PROGRAM

‘Spud Nation’ report looks at potential economic impact of additional U.S. potato exports

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – U.S. potato exports generate about \$4.78 billion in economic activity annually and support almost 34,000 jobs in the United States, according to a new report released Feb. 26.

The report also found that “moderate and achievable” expansion of U.S. potato exports in foreign markets would generate an additional \$1 billion in economic activity in the United States and support another 5,600 jobs.

“The results of the study are eye-opening and informative,” National Potato Council President Bob Mattive, a Colorado potato grower, said Feb. 26 during a media roundtable to discuss the report. “We all know that potatoes are America’s favorite vegetable. Now we also know that potatoes hold the key to unlocking some further job growth and economic development for our nation.”

Titled, “Spud Nation: The Current and Potential Impact of Expanded Potato Exports,” the National Potato Council-commissioned report was authored by economists from Michigan State University.

U.S. potato growers typically produce between 41-45 billion pounds of potatoes each year. Idaho is the nation’s top potato-producing state and Gem State farmers produce about a third of the nation’s total spud crop.

Washington ranks No. 2 in the United States in potato production and other major spud-producing states include Wisconsin, Oregon, North Dakota,

Colorado, Minnesota, Maine, Michigan, Nebraska and California.

A first-of-its-kind report released last year by NPC found that the U.S. potato sector contributed an estimated \$101 billion directly and indirectly to the nation’s economy in 2021.

That “Spud Nation” report, which was also authored by MSU economists, found that the potato sector generates an estimated 714,000 jobs in the U.S. and annual wages of about \$34 billion.

That 2023 report marked the first time any organization has measured the national economic import of potatoes. This year’s report looked at the potential economic impact of expanding U.S. potato exports.

About 20 percent of all potatoes grown in the United States are exported, either in fresh or processed (frozen) form.

The 2024 report found the U.S. exported \$2.2 billion worth of potatoes and potato products from July 2022 to June 2023.

It estimated the total contribution to the U.S. economy of those exports amounted to \$4.78 billion and 33,846 jobs.

The Spud Nation report estimated that based upon a “conservative and achievable” \$463 million expansion of potato product exports, U.S. gross domestic product would increase by \$1.02

billion and result in an additional 5,600 domestic jobs.

“This latest Spud Nation report highlights the fact that potatoes are vital to our country and, with more trade opportunities, we will be able to deliver even more

“That economic activity didn’t just benefit potato growers, but also farm laborers, process workers, truck drivers, longshoremen; and the communities that they live in all benefited from trade of U.S. potatoes.”

– Bob Mattive, National Potato Council President, Colorado potato grower

economic value into the future,” said NPC CEO Kam Quarles.

The report identified three major barriers to increased expansion of U.S. potato exports: tariffs and quotas, the value of the U.S. dollar, and phytosanitary and technical issues.

Ensuring mitigation of potential plant pest and disease issues is a legitimate concern for any nation but some countries are effectively using them as weapons to prevent market access for U.S. potato products, Quarles said.

Too often, he said, “You’re not talking about reasonable mitigation. You’re talking about countries utilizing pest and disease ... excuses as reasons not to negotiate, not to open their markets, not to consider the possibility of foreign imports coming in.”

The release of this year’s report coincides with the NPC’s 2024 Washington Summit, a forum in Washington, D.C., where members discuss and advocate for the policy priorities of the nation’s spud industry.

Potato growers and industry representatives participating in the summit will share results of the recent report with members of congress and the administration to help advocate for the potato industry, said

RJ Andrus, an Idaho potato grower who served as NPC president in 2023.



Photo by Sean Ellis

A potato file near Firth is harvested in this Idaho Farm Bureau Federation file photo. A new report explores the potential economic impact of additional U.S. potato exports.

“This week during the Washington Summit, our growers and industry partners are charged with reminding our congressional delegations that not only are they important to their districts, they are important to the nation as a whole,” he said.

Quarles said the 2024 report “will serve as a new tool in our toolbox to advocate for our long-standing policy priority, which is expanding foreign market access for U.S. potatoes.”

The report looks at possible expansion of U.S. potato products in mature markets for the U.S. spud industry, such as Japan, Canada and Mexico, as well as potential emerging markets with strong potential for growth, such as Vietnam, Saudi Arabia and Singapore.

Japan, in particular, represents a major opportunity for growth, NPC officials said during the media roundtable. That nation is currently a major market for processed U.S. potato products but does not allow fresh potato imports from any country.

“If open, Japan would become a massive new market for U.S. fresh potato exports estimated at \$150 million to \$200 million

annually,” Andrus said.

The U.S. industry is currently working with USDA and the U.S. trade representative’s office to try to achieve market access in Japan for fresh U.S. potatoes, Quarles said.

The U.S. request for fresh potato market access into Japan goes back more than two decades but the Japanese government has dug its heels in on the issue, he said.

“It’s a big stalling exercise right now by (Japan) and we’re trying to pry that (market) open,” Quarles said.

The 2023 and 2024 reports looked at the economic impact of the entire U.S. potato supply chain, from agricultural production to wholesaling, processing and distribution, to consumer purchases of final products through retail channels or food service providers.

“So that economic activity didn’t just benefit potato growers, but also farm laborers, process workers, truck drivers, longshoremen; and the communities that they live in all benefited from trade of U.S. potatoes,” said Mattive. ■

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