

GEM STATE **Producer** Idaho Farm Bureau

September 2020 • Volume 24 Issue 6

The humble sugar beet



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New barley
facility, 18

Your voice, your American Farm Bureau



A lot has changed this year. Gatherings are much smaller or held outside or online. We have adapted to a new “normal” of spreading out, wearing masks and giving elbow bumps.

More of us are staying home. But for all that has changed—for a time that is—there are fundamental things that have not changed.

We are still finding ways to celebrate together, and to mourn together. We are still caring for our families and neighbors. We are still farming and ranching. And at American Farm

Bureau, we are still working hard to ensure our members have a voice in Washington, D.C.

Even though our staff in Washington are based in their home offices for now, that hasn’t changed their dedication to fighting for each of you back at home on your farms and ranches. Our team misses gathering in person, getting out to visit you, and meeting with you all as you come to Washington.

But we haven’t let that distance stand in the way of keeping us connected. I am proud of the

See **DUVALL**, page 7

The President’s Desk

By Bryan Searle

President Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Some good signs for Idaho’s ag industry



Idaho farmers and ranchers, like their colleagues around the nation, have faced some serious challenges due to COVID-19, but recently there have been some positive signs for the Gem State’s agricultural industry.

Together, those recent developments appear to show Idaho’s ag industry is strong and healthy, even with the challenges posed by the reactions to the COVID outbreak.

Some farm commodity prices have been on a roller-coaster ride due largely to the COVID-related shutdown of many foodservice channels.

That is certainly true for milk, beef and potatoes, the state’s three main ag commodities in terms of cash receipts.

Idaho produces about 180 different ag commodities and many of the state’s other commodities have also faced significant price pressures.

Many Idaho farmers and ranchers have faced great uncertainty because of the pandemic. Despite that fact, they have proceeded with their usual plans to grow and produce an abundant food supply for the nation and world.

See **SEARLE**, page 6

Inside Farm Bureau

By Zak Miller

CEO Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

County fairs and fair regulations



Even during a pandemic, the fair season is beautiful! Friends and neighbors are able for a brief period to see what good soil and experienced hands can bring forth.

Talented artistry, home goods, and of course, 4-H and FFA projects are always awe-inspiring when we realize the gifts our neighbors and especially our youth have.

Few things show the potential and grit of our youth more than a judged competition at a county fair. Regardless of the class, you can find competitors holding on for a prized buckle, large

Rossette ribbon, trophy, etc.

And especially in the livestock classes, you can also find many who are just holding on! For one, I have a recurring nightmare of my children’s 4-H steer running down Main Street completely unaccompanied.

This is a unique fair season and one that we hope to not see again. Many communities have been forced to cancel their annual fair, and others have had to modify the experience.

Each community needs a fair each year; without

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MAGAZINE CONTACTS:

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

Senators push for more fresh potato access to Mexico

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – Idaho’s potato industry is applauding a letter issued by the state’s two U.S. senators calling for increased access for U.S. fresh potato exports into Mexico.

U.S. potato producers can ship frozen, processed and dried potatoes to Mexico but their access to that nation’s fresh potato market is severely restricted.

Fresh U.S. potatoes can only be exported within a 16-mile zone south of the U.S.-Mexico border.

“This limitation greatly reduces opportunities for U.S. potato producers and further limits options for Mexican consumers,” states a letter from Idaho Republican Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch and Sen. Cory Gardner, R-Colo.

The letter was sent to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue and U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and asks them to continue advocating for increased access for U.S. fresh potato exports to Mexico during any trade negotiations with the Mexican government.

“We encourage you to consider the use of all available mechanisms, including the new dispute resolution authority under the (U.S.-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement), to ensure Mexico honors its agreement to allow U.S. potatoes to reach Mexican consumers,” the letter states.

Mexico, with a population of more than 126 million people, is the third largest importer of U.S. potato products even with the restriction on fresh potato exports and gaining access to all of the Mexican market is the U.S. potato industry’s top priority, said Idaho Potato Commission CEO Frank Muir.

See **POTATOES**, page 15

Photo by Sean Ellis
Idaho's potato industry is applauding a letter issued by the state's two U.S. senators calling for increased access for U.S. fresh potato exports into Mexico.

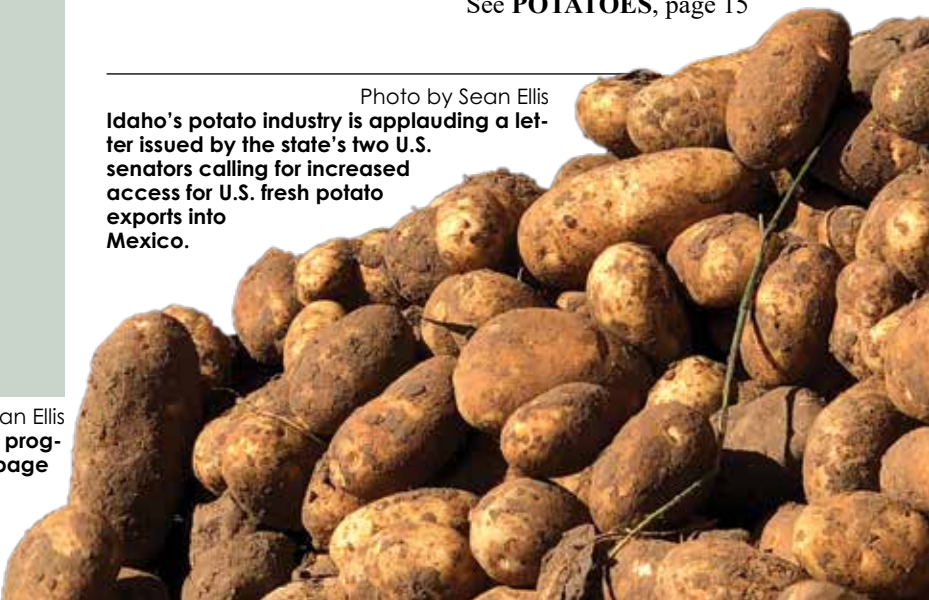


Photo by Sean Ellis

COVER: Sugar beet farmer Randy Grant checks on the progress of his crop in a field near Hazelton in August. See page 12 for story on Idaho's sugar beet industry.



Photo by Sean Ellis

Led by sales of dairy products abroad, the total value of Idaho farm product exports rose 6 percent during the first six months of 2020.

Idaho farm product exports up 6 percent through end of June

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – Idaho’s agriculture industry continues to export a lot of farm products to other countries despite the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The total value of Idaho’s agricultural

exports increased 6 percent during the first six months of 2020 compared with the same time last year.

According to data released by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, Idaho exported \$477 million worth of farm products to other nations through

the second quarter of 2020, up from \$450 million during the same period in 2019.

That’s a positive sign for the state’s important agricultural sector but the numbers almost certainly would have been even higher had the coronavirus

outbreak not occurred, said Laura Johnson, who manages the ISDA's market development division.

The shutdown of large swaths of the foodservice industry had a major impact on the farm industry and those shutdowns weren't unique to the United States, she said.

"Had the COVID outbreak not occurred, the ag export numbers would have been higher, that's safe to say," Johnson said. "Absolutely we would have seen more sales and more demand in other markets."

Doug Robison, the Idaho president of Northwest Farm Credit Service, said several factors played a role in Idaho's farm export growth through the end of June.

Food insecurity has been a challenge for many countries as a result of COVID-19, especially those countries that rely on imports for their food supply, he told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation in an email.

"Many of these countries increased reserves or stockpiled to ensure adequate food availability in the face of supply chain disruptions," Robison said.

The U.S. dollar peaked at the end of March and has trended steadily lower throughout the second quarter, supporting export growth, he added.

Another factor, he said, is that the U.S.-Japan trade agreement that went into effect earlier this year has benefited Idaho ag exports through reduced tariffs and increased trade with Japan in 2020.

The total value of Idaho ag exports to Japan rose 32 percent during the first half of 2020 compared with 2019.

And, Robison said, while China has lagged in meeting its "phase-one" trade commitments with the United States, the nation has increased its purchases of U.S. agricultural commodities.


"This has benefited Idaho through increased exports to China during the second quarter," he said.

The value of Idaho ag exports to China totaled \$31 million through the second quarter of 2020, an increase of 23 percent over the same period in 2019.

Much of that total came from whey exports sold from Idaho companies to

China, Johnson said, as China is buying a lot of dairy whey to feed its hogs to support the rebound of its swine industry.

The top destination for Idaho ag exports, by value, through the first six



“Had the COVID outbreak not occurred, the ag export numbers would have been higher, that’s safe to say. Absolutely we would have seen more sales and more demand in other markets.”

— Laura Johnson, ISDA market development division.

months of the year was Canada. Idaho ag exports to that nation totaled \$130 million, down 5 percent from 2019.

Mexico was the No. 2 market for Idaho ag product exports with \$92 million worth of purchases, a 4 percent increase over the same six-month period in 2019.

South Korea ranked third at \$41

million, up 11 percent over 2019, Japan was fourth at \$32 million, a 32 percent increase, and China was fifth.

Idaho farm exports to some nations increased dramatically during the first half of the year.

For example, \$6 million worth of Idaho farm products were sold to Vietnam through the second quarter, a 621 percent increase over 2019, and Idaho ag exports to the Philippines increased 104 percent to \$7 million.

Idaho ag exports listed under the “dairy” category totaled \$96 million during the first six months of 2020, down 5 percent from 2019.

But when separate categories that includes dairy whey above 85 percent protein and dairy lactose are factored in, the total value of Idaho dairy exports increased 7 percent to \$150 million.

The total value of Idaho ag exports listed under the “edible vegetables” category decreased 11 percent to \$79 million, while a category that includes mostly malt totaled \$56 million, up 6 percent from 2019. Most of the malt from Idaho goes to Mexico to be used in the beer brewing process.

The total value of the “oilseeds” category decreased 6 percent to \$47 million, while the “prepared vegetables” category increased 16 percent to \$37 million.

The value of Idaho live animal exports totaled \$24 million through the second quarter, a 40 percent increase over 2019.

The total value of Idaho's “cereals” exports rose 195 percent, to \$23 million.

These export value numbers are based on U.S. Census Bureau data that is available on a quarterly basis. They don't capture all of the state's farm exports because they are based on where a product was shipped from and don't include some Idaho farm products that moved to another state before being sent overseas.

However, the data provides a good glimpse of how Idaho farm product exports are trending and the numbers do track closely with annual USDA data that is released in the fall and does capture all of the state's farm exports.

The USDA data is more exhaustive while the Census Bureau data is more timely. ■

SEARLE

Continued from page 2

That shows a strong resilience and faith in the future of this nation and its agricultural industry.

Three have been a few major announcements recently that show some big players in the ag industry also have faith in the long-term health of Idaho's farming and ranching industry.

Scoular Co. announced in June that it would build a \$13 million barley processing facility and the likely location would be Idaho. On Aug. 11, the company officially announced it would build that facility in Jerome in southcentral Idaho.

Idaho is the nation's No. 1 barley producing state and it was no big shocker that Scoular chose to build the facility here. Still, it was a positive sign that Scoular, a global grain, feed and food ingredient company, believes in the long-term future of Idaho's barley industry.

I and other IFBF representatives also

attended the July 31 announcement by Agri Beef Co., a family-run business that is based in Idaho, that it will build a regional beef processing facility in Jerome. The state-of-the-art facility will initially be designed to process up to 500 head of cattle per day.

According to company officials, the plant will also represent an alternative model in the beef processing industry in that livestock producers and feeders will be equity owners in the new venture, which will be known as True West Beef.

Agri Beef's decision to locate the new facility in Idaho is a great sign that the company believes in the long-term health of the state's livestock industry. Farm Bureau representatives expressed our appreciation to Agri Beef, as this couldn't come at a more needed time with all the struggles occurring within the packing business.

During the first half of August, the Idaho State Department of Agriculture released federally tracked data that show the total value of Idaho's agricultural exports increased 6

percent during the first half of 2020.

According to the data, Idaho exported \$477 million worth of ag products to other nations from January through June, up from \$450 million during the same six-month period a year ago.

While it can be argued that total would have been even higher had the COVID outbreak not occurred, it is certainly great news that Idaho's ag exports have increased during this challenging time.

All this is not to say that things are all good and rosy in farm country. They are not and farmers and ranchers face some significant challenges, including lackluster prices.

But together, these recent developments do show the state's overall agricultural industry is strong and resilient and finding ways to make things happen.

Agriculture is the top sector of Idaho's overall economy, according to a recent University of Idaho study, and these recent developments are also a good sign for the state itself. ■

MILLER

Continued from page 2

them, our neighbors lose even more of their vital connection to agriculture and our children miss out on the opportunities to see that hard work on their projects really does pay off and that their communities are genuinely invested in and supportive of their youth.

It never ceases to amaze me the support that many of our small communities give to the youth at a county fair. It is truly an annual miracle. I believe each fair's capstone is the livestock sale; this is where each participant learns that their community cares for them.

Every time I see a sale sheet at a fair, the same thought always crosses my mind: How will every one of these animals ever sell?

It always seems impossible that there can be enough buyers to give an excellent price for every project that is set to sell.

But every time, the miracle happens; I have never seen an animal go unsold. The heart of our communities is just too big to

let something like that happen.

There is also a second miracle that happens at every sale. All the animals go somewhere. Most are taken to the local butcher who must not sleep for a few weeks at fair time. How they do it is a mystery and a miracle in my eyes. Still, every year they find a way to accomplish the task.

This year especially is a miracle with reports of local butchers being so inundated with orders that producers must schedule processing six months to one year away.

Even more reason to love, support and need local fairs are the good people who buy livestock projects and the good butchers who make sure they are processed.

The 2020 fair season brings another need to light: a fair system for meat processing. COVID-19 has shown the desire of many consumers to simplify and localize their food purchases.

However, our current meat-processing infrastructure has not been as accommodating as it should be. We can see the

evidence of this in 12-month waiting times for animal processing.

COVID may have caused a shock in livestock processing, but burdensome regulation is also to blame. There is not enough meat-processing capacity in our state and nation. Access to USDA inspectors needs to be evaluated and improved. Locally inspected meat should be available to all communities.

Another challenge that needs to be addressed is the excessive regulations that meat processors face when they want to improve or expand their operations. Common sense needs to be at play to protect the environment and grow our economy.

At our county fairs, if a youth is willing to put in the time, the community will reward them for their efforts.

We are grateful to live in such a great state and in communities that are working to find ways to similarly reward our meat processors when they put in the right effort to process our animals while at the same time protect our workers and the environment. ■

'You go to the people you trust in times of crisis, and when it comes to agriculture, leaders and lawmakers in Washington go to Farm Bureau.'

DUVALL

Continued from page 2

creativity and perseverance of our AFBF team as they host remote meetings and trainings and regularly check in with Farm Bureau leaders and staff across the country.

The lines of communication across Farm Bureau are stronger than ever, and those lines extend well beyond our own fencerows.

Thanks to the relationships American Farm Bureau has built and the reputation we have cultivated over our history, we continue to lead the way together in strengthening agriculture.

You go to the people you trust in times of crisis, and when it comes to agriculture, leaders and lawmakers in Washington go to Farm Bureau.

Our team has worked tirelessly with Congress and the administration to ensure your farms have the resources you need throughout this crisis.

And we're not done either. Every farmer and rancher must have access to the opportunities and help that is available to get us to the other side of this crisis.

During the first part of August, USDA answered our call to extend the deadline for Coronavirus Food Assistance Program funds, so that more farmers can access these critical resources. The coronavirus pandemic and its impact have not spared any region or commodity, and we must all do our part to protect our nation's food supply.

Your American Farm Bureau team is also leading the way when it comes to bringing the latest information and analysis throughout this crisis.

AFBF's Market Intel reports, from John Newton and his team, set the standard in the agriculture industry for economic analysis. These insights have been a critical resource with industry leaders across Washington to Capitol Hill and USDA—as they assess COVID-19's impact on markets, jobs numbers, trade and rural infrastructure.

Above all, American Farm Bureau wants to shine the spotlight on you, America's farmers and ranchers. We are proud to be working for you, and we want consumers to hear your stories.

That's what led us to start the #StillFarming social media campaign this spring, and it's been a great success thanks to everyone pulling together across the Farm Bureau family to share agriculture's story.

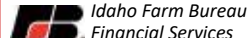
Through #StillFarming, we have reached 89 million people

and gotten a positive sentiment rate that is off the charts at 89%. I know it may not always feel like 89% of folks have a positive view of agriculture, but this should encourage all of us to keep sharing our story.

There's a hunger out there for folks to know more about where their food comes from, and there's a real strength in all of us joining our voices together.

I often like to compare Farm Bureau to a three-legged stool: one leg is your county, another is your state, and the final leg is the national organization. All are equally important and play a critical role in our success.

Our team at AFBF is proud to be standing with each of you across this great organization, both to take on our greatest challenges and celebrate our greatest achievements. We all need each other to stand strong and make our voices heard. ■

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Photo by Sean Ellis

Jay Theiler, executive vice president of strategy and public relations for Agri Beef Co., announces July 31 that the company will build a regional beef processing plant in Jerome.

Jerome will be site of new regional beef processing plant

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

JEROME – Idaho-based Agri Beef Co. announced July 31 it will build a state-of-the-art regional beef processing facility in Jerome.

The project, known as True West Beef,

is a partnership between Agri Beef and livestock producers and feeders in Idaho and throughout the West, who will be equity owners in the venture.

Agri Beef currently operates a mid-sized beef processing plant in Toppenish, Wash., and the family-run business is involved in most chains of the beef

supply industry.

The project was kept under tight secrecy until it was announced July 31 in a hangar at the Jerome County Airport.

Agri Beef Co. President and CEO Robert Rebholtz Jr. told participants that after the announcement, “Jerome County is going to be well known. This

is going to attract some national attention, especially within our industry.”

Beef cattle is Idaho’s No. 2 agricultural commodity in terms of total farm-gate receipts and the new facility is expected to provide a significant boost to the state’s ranching industry.

The U.S. beef industry is dominated by large packing facilities that process upward of 5,000 head of cattle per day, said Jay Theiler, executive vice president of strategy and public relations for Agri Beef.

The Jerome plant will be smaller – it is initially being designed to process 500 head a day – and more flexible and unique in that livestock producers will be directly involved in equity ownership, he said.

“It represents a new model and new direction” in the beef industry, Theiler said.

Gov. Brad Little, a rancher, said the new facility will be “a big, big, addition” to Idaho’s agricultural industry. “It’s not just 500 head a day. It’s 500 head of highly, highly prized, value-added, highly marketed livestock that is going to (be sold) throughout the world.”

“This new facility from this incredible Idaho-based company is very, very welcome,” he said.

The new facility is expected to create at least 370 new jobs and company officials said they hope for the facility to be processing beef by late 2021 or early 2022.

Agri Beef officials said they received strong support from local, regional and state officials.

In a news release, Wade Small, executive vice president of business development for Agri Beef, said the company evaluated many sites for the venture and Jerome checked all the boxes when it came to access to plentiful agricultural resources, an educated workforce “and a vibrant community with a can-do spirit.”

In the news release, Idaho State Department of Agriculture Director Celia Gould, a rancher, pointed out that when forage, grain and other allied industries are factored in, the livestock sector, which includes the state’s dairy industry, accounts for about 75 percent of Idaho agriculture’s gross receipts.

“An investment made in the livestock sector ripples through Idaho’s entire agricultural industry and to communities across the state,” she stated.

Theiler said most of the nation’s beef comes from the Midwest but the True West Beef facility is designed as an alternative model in the beef processing segment where large facilities dominate the industry.

“We believe at our core that the best producers, the best

products and the best climate for beef is right here in Idaho and the Northwest,” he said. The facility “represents a new model and a new direction.”

In a video shown for participants of the July 31 announcement event, company officials said True West Beef “is a new and progressive model for beef production in the United States.” ■





Idaho Farm Bureau Federation photo

The U.S. Forest Service has joined the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in asking Idaho ranchers who water livestock on federal land to sign agreements stating that they are doing so as limited agents of the federal government. Idaho Farm Bureau Federation and others are cautioning ranchers against rushing to sign the agreements.

Ranchers cautioned against signing ‘voluntary agreements’

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – The U.S. Forest Service has joined the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in asking Idaho ranchers who water livestock on federal land to sign agreements stating that they are doing so as limited agents of the federal government.

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation officials and others are cautioning

ranchers against rushing to sign the agreements, which imply that ranchers could lose access to in-stream stock watering on federal land if they don’t sign.

IFBF Director of Governmental Affairs Russ Hendricks said the Forest Service is trying to scare people into signing the voluntary agreements by telling them their water could be in jeopardy if they don’t.

“It certainly appears from an outside observer’s standpoint that

they are using pressure, deception and scare tactics to try to get permittees to sign the agreements,” he said. “There is no legal way anyone can take away the water but they are implying that, if you don’t sign this, you are not going to have any water for your cattle. That is not true and it’s deceptive.”

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management is also asking ranchers who water their stock on BLM ground to sign similar agreements.

Hendricks said if a rancher signs the agreement, it would prohibit the rancher from filing for in-stream stock watering rights in his own name on federal land in the future.

The issue is basically a rehash of a landmark 2007 water rights ruling by the Idaho Supreme Court that is known as the Joyce Livestock Decision.

In that decision, the Idaho Supreme Court ruled in favor of two Owyhee County ranchers, Tim Lowry and Paul Nettleton, in their battle with the BLM over who owns in-stream stock watering rights on federally administered land.

During the state’s Snake River Basin Adjudication process, southern Idaho ranchers and the BLM and Forest Service filed thousands of overlapping claims to in-stream stock watering rights on federal land.

All but two of the ranchers, Nettleton and Lowry, backed off or negotiated with the BLM when they realized fighting the federal agency in court would cost a lot of money.

Agreeing with Nettleton and Lowry, the state’s supreme court ruled that BLM couldn’t own the rights because it doesn’t own cows and couldn’t put the water to beneficial use.

In its ruling, the Idaho Supreme Court said BLM’s argument reflected a serious misunderstanding of Idaho water law.

The court’s ruling also applies to in-stream stock watering rights on Forest Service land.

The USFS in 2014 withdrew 36 claims for stock watering rights during the North Idaho Water Adjudication process after the Idaho Department of Water Resources sent the agency a letter requiring it to show evidence of beneficial use.

The Idaho Legislature passed a bill a few years ago that codifies the Idaho Supreme Court’s 2007 decision into state law, which paves the way for thousands of ranchers in Idaho to file claims for in-stream stock watering rights on federal land.

But Idaho Farm Bureau Federation officials say that in an effort to keep their illegitimate water rights, Forest Service and BLM are now encouraging permittees to sign agreements stating that they are acting as limited agents of the federal government and that their livestock are putting the water to beneficial use for the agency.

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation sent USFS several questions regarding this issue and a U.S. Forest Service public affairs officer sent IFBF a list of the agency’s responses by email.

In their response, USFS officials said that in its ruling in the Joyce decision, “The Idaho Supreme Court also stated that a rancher could act as an agent of a landowner.”

“Currently, if the Forest Service can secure agency relationships with its permittees, then the Forest Service’s water rights will not be subject to forfeiture,” Forest Service officials stated.

“Establishment of an agreement provides assurance that water rights already held by the Forest Service are retained for national



Idaho Farm Bureau Federation photo
The U.S. Forest Service has joined the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in asking Idaho ranchers who water livestock on federal land to sign agreements stating that they are doing so as limited agents of the federal government. Idaho Farm Bureau Federation and others are cautioning ranchers against rushing to sign the agreements.

forest purposes and for the long-term benefit of both the grazing program and grazing permittees,” Forest Service officials stated.

USFS officials also said that a permittee’s participation is strictly voluntary, “but by signing an agreement, all Forest Service stockwater rights in an allotment will continue to be available to the permittee and will help ensure the grazing permittee can continue to utilize those state-based stockwater rights for the term of any applicable Forest Service grazing permit and renewals. Water

See **WATER**, page 15

The humble sugar beet:



Photo by Sean Ellis

The average sugar beet, such as this one in a field near Hazelton, produces about one cup of sugar.

paying the bills for 100 years

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Sugar beets aren't the flashiest crop around and they don't get a lot of headlines, but they have been paying the bills in Idaho farm country for more than 100 years.

About 700 Idaho farmers annually grow roughly 180,000 acres of sugar beets, which are processed and turned into sugar. About 55 percent of the sugar produced in the United States comes from sugar beets.

Many farmers who grow sugar beets in Idaho also grow potatoes, Idaho's most famous commodity, which garners far more headlines than sugar beets do.

As an example, after last year's early October cold snap, there were plenty of stories written about how it impacted the state's spud crop but not so many about how it affected sugar beets.

Hazelton sugar beet farmer Randy Grant said he has no problem with the relative lack of attention the crop

receives from the general public and media.

“It’s not a big deal that we’re under the radar,” he said. “We don’t need to be potatoes or another crop. We just need to be the humble beet that pays the bills.”

Sugar beets have been grown in Idaho since the early 1900s.

“They’ve been paying the bills for generations,” said Grant, president of the Idaho Sugarbeet Growers Association’s board of directors. “Many generations of farmers in Idaho have grown up growing sugar beets.”

Sugar beets may not be the flashiest crop around but they are very reliable when it comes to bringing a stable return on investment to farmers who grow them, said ISGA Executive Director Brad Griff.

Part of the reason for that is the federal sugar program, which controls how much sugar is allowed to be imported into the United States, depending on how much sugar is produced domestically.

If U.S. sugar beet and cane farmers produce a lot of sugar in a given year, fewer imports are allowed into the country. If they produce less, more sugar is allowed into the country.

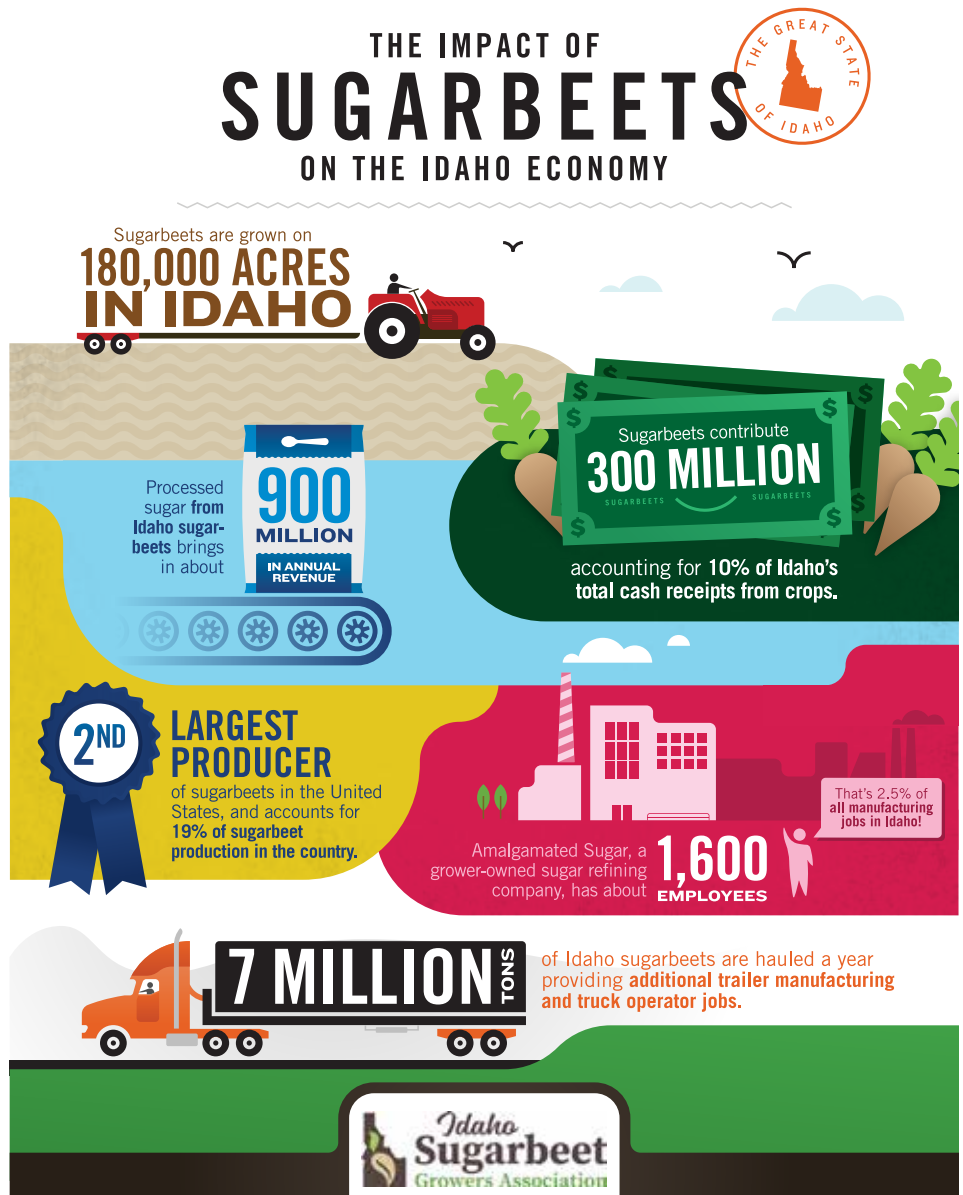
As a result, “We basically know what the price will be within a reasonable range,” Griff said. “It’s a very reliable crop and the price is very stable.”

Idaho’s sugar beet farmers own Amalgamated Sugar Co., which operates three plants in Idaho – in Paul, Twin Falls and Nampa – where the beets are processed into sugar.

Amalgamated is a \$1 billion company, and about 1,600 employees work in the processing facilities.

Including the roughly \$300 million in farm cash receipts that sugar beet farmers bring in each year, the crop has a major impact on the state’s economy and underpins many rural economies.

When the secondary impacts of the industry are added in, such as the trucking and other side businesses that support the industry, the impact the crop has on Idaho is very significant, said Mike Garner, a sugar beet farmer from Raft River who is chairman of the Snake River



Sugar Co.’s board of directors.

“Sugar beets generate a lot of revenue in Idaho and there is a lot of trickle-down effect as well,” he said. “A lot of families, a lot of people, depend on that crop in Idaho.”

Sugar beets have been an attractive option for Idaho farmers for a long time, Garner said.

“It shows positive returns per acre very consistently, and good returns,” he said. “It’s been a very solid crop in the state for many, many years.”

New Plymouth sugar beet farmer Galen Lee said another reason that sugar

beet prices have been relatively stable over the years is that sugar beet growers own shares in the cooperative that owns Amalgamated. Those shares obligate a farmer to grow a certain number of acres each year.

“You can’t jump in and out of sugar beets, which results in a pretty stable market,” said Lee, a member of Idaho Farm Bureau Federation’s board of directors. “They provide a stable return year in and year out.”

“It’s a very stable crop in the type of row-crop farming we have here in southern Idaho,” said Grant. “They’re



pretty stable year in and year out so you can look ahead and put a budget together because you know the prices are going to be in a range that is usually profitable.”

Despite the important role sugar beets play in Idaho’s economy and the state’s agricultural industry, many if not most Idahoans have little to no idea what a sugar beet is.

“A lot of people, when you tell them you’re a sugar beet farmer, they think the red table beet that you buy in the store,” Grant said. “You don’t eat them; you process them into sugar.”

An average sugar beet produces about one cup of sugar, as well as 2.4 ounces of beet pulp, which is a good feed source

for cattle.

Because you don’t buy sugar beets in a store, “A lot of times, people don’t know that sugar comes from sugar beets,” Griff said.

Many Idahoans’ first introduction to a sugar beet is seeing one laying on the road after getting bumped off one of the trucks that haul 7 million tons of beets to the state’s three processing facilities each year.

“Little do they know that one of those beets will make about one cup of sugar,” Lee said.

The crop’s public profile got a boost this past New Year’s Eve when a giant, two-story tall sugar beet was slowly lowered in Rupert’s town square on mid-

night to ring in the new year.

“That is pretty unique in the country and probably the world, too,” Lee said. “It shows the community support that sugar beets have and how important they are to many rural areas in southern Idaho.”

While the general public is collectively clueless about sugar beets, the rural communities that grow them understand them well, Griff said.

“They play a huge part in many rural communities around the United States and especially here in Idaho,” he said. “We’re definitely a little under the radar, which we’re fine with because sugar beets pay the mortgage in farm country.” ■

POTATOES

Continued from page 3

“It has been for some time,” he said. “Mexico would be an incredible market for” the U.S. fresh potato industry.

The U.S. potato industry is currently shipping about 100 truckloads of fresh potatoes within the 16-mile zone in Mexico and Idaho has about 25 percent of that market share, Muir said.

He said he has not done any hard projections on what opening all of Mexico to fresh U.S. potatoes would mean in dollar terms but based on the 100 truckloads a week already being shipped there, “you can imagine it would be a pretty significant opportunity.”

According to an industry email update by IPC, the U.S. potato industry was promised by Mexico 20 years ago that American potatoes would be allowed into Mexico in exchange for Mexican avocados being allowed into the United States.

“The United States has complied with

the deal; Mexico has not,” the industry update stated.

It added that the “U.S. potato industry has begun to explore the imposition of tariffs on Mexican avocados to compensate U.S. potato growers for the 20 years of lost sales caused by Mexico’s failure to comply with their part of the agreement.”

According to the senators’ letter, U.S. potato exporters were finally allowed to export fresh potatoes throughout all of Mexico beginning on May 19, 2014. But the Mexican potato industry sued the Mexican government and the general U.S. fresh potato export ban was reinstated. The issue is pending before the Mexican Supreme Court.

Idaho leads the United States in potato production and produces about a third of the nation’s total spud crop. Potatoes are Idaho’s top crop in terms of farm cash receipts and are a multi-billion-dollar industry in the state.

IPC Chairman Nick Blanksma, a potato

farmer from Hammett, said gaining access to all of Mexico would represent a huge opportunity for the Idaho and U.S. potato industry.

“It would do great things for our fresh industry and our supply chain to be able to tap into that market,” he said. “We’ve done a really good job in that 16-mile zone and America would do well selling fresh potatoes into Mexico.”

Based on how many U.S. potatoes are already being sold within the 16-mile zone in Mexico, “We should be able to compete well in that market,” said IPC Commissioner Ritchey Toevs, a potato farmer from Aberdeen. “Getting access to all of the market in that nation would be huge.”

Muir said the U.S. potato industry has surpassed all of the hurdles that are required by the two nation’s trade agreement to ship potatoes into all of Mexico.

“It’s time for Mexico to allow fresh U.S. potatoes beyond that 16-mile limit,” he said. “This has been a long time coming.” ■

WATER

Continued from page 11

rights that are not covered by an agreement face a risk of forfeiture proceedings before the Idaho Department of Water Resources.”

The letter that the USFS is asking ranchers to sign states claims an agreement “does not foreclose the option of a permittee to pursue obtaining water rights on their own.”

Paul Nettleton, one of the Owyhee County ranchers who prevailed against the BLM in the Joyce decision, said if a rancher signs the agreement, they are essentially giving the water right to the federal government.

“This is kind of a last-ditch effort from the BLM and Forest Service to get our water rights,” he said. “They couldn’t do it through the courts so they are asking you to voluntarily give it to them.”

Hendricks said that under Idaho water law, there is not a legal way a rancher who is putting the water to beneficial use can lose that water right, but Forest Service and BLM “are implying that, if you don’t sign this, you are not going to have any water for your cattle. That is simply not true.”

Forest Service representatives in Idaho did not respond to questions about this issue before this article was written.

Sen. Mark Harris, a Republican rancher from Soda Springs who runs cattle on BLM and Forest Service land, has received letters from both agencies asking him to agree that he is acting as a limited agent of the federal government when he waters his livestock on federal land.

His advice to other ranchers: Don’t sign.

“I would tell them – and I have told people – not so sign,” Harris said. “The whole purpose in codifying the Joyce decision into state law was to stop the federal government from taking water rights from ranchers. (The BLM and Forest Service) found a way to take it anyway by asking permit holders to sign these agreements.”

Rep. Judy Boyle, a Republican rancher from Midvale, also strongly cautioned people against signing the agreements.

“Everybody is disgusted that this is happening,” she said. “It’s unbelievable to me that we had the ruling in the Idaho Supreme Court case 13 years ago and we are still going through this and fighting with the

feds over this issue.”

Idaho Cattle Association Executive Vice President Cameron Mulrony said ICA is trying to educate ranchers on the issue and ensure they have the correct information they need to make an informed decision that is right for their operation.

“Until you understand exactly what your permit is and what your water right is, do not get in a hurry to sign,” he said. “Understand where your water is at and what your water rights are and then make the best decision for your operation.”

Hendricks said the Idaho Supreme Court was very clear in the Joyce Livestock Decision that the federal government cannot own stockwater rights because it doesn’t own livestock.

“Their whole effort in trying to get ranchers to sign these agreements is to legitimize the illegitimate rights that they are holding by getting the permittees to say, ‘Yes, I’m an agent of the federal government. My livestock are putting the water to beneficial use for them,’” he said. “Why would anybody agree to that when they can get the water right in their own name?” ■

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By Jonny Hawkins



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New barley production facility will be built in Jerome

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – It's official: Scoular Co.'s new \$13 million barley processing facility will be built in Jerome.

Scoular announced in June that the facility would likely be built in southern Idaho, but the company confirmed Aug. 11 that Jerome will be the location for the facility, which will process 1.9 million bushels of barley annually.

That represents almost 4 percent of Idaho's total barley production and industry leaders said the new operation will provide a positive boost to Idaho's barley industry.

"It's a great win for the Idaho barley industry," said Idaho Barley Commission Chairman Mike Wilkins, who farms in the Rupert area. "It's a good deal for the industry and I'm excited about it."

Idaho leads the United States in barley production and Idaho farmers produce about one-third of the nation's total barley crop. Most of the barley produced here is grown for malt for the beer-brewing industry, while the rest is grown for human food or animal feed.

Idaho growers produced 55 million bushels of barley last year off of 520,000 acres.

The new operation is expected to begin manufacturing in May 2021 and will be located at a site near Scoular's existing livestock feed ingredients facility in Jerome. Scoular is a global grain, feed and food ingredient company.

The 15,000-square-foot facility will produce a barley protein concentrate that is a plant-based alternative protein used in aquaculture feed and pet food.

Idaho is one of the national leaders in aquaculture production and leads the nation in trout produced for food.

Scoular officials in a news release said Jerome was chosen both for its proximity to barley growers and the end markets for



Scoular photo

Scoular Co. has announced that Jerome will be the site of the company's new \$13 million barley processing facility. The global grain, feed and food ingredient company has several grain handling facilities in Idaho, including this one in Jerome.

the products the facility will produce.

The new facility is expected to add 10,000 to 12,000 new barley acres in Idaho over the next three years, said JC Olson, product group manager for Scoular. He said the additional production will compliment the state's existing barley industry and not take away from current malt barley acres.

"It's very positive news for Idaho barley," IBC Administrator Laura Wilder said about the new facility. "It will be very complimentary to our current Idaho malt industry."

"They are not going after malt acres, which is important," she added. "These are additional barley acres."

Olson told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation that Scoular is "absolutely committed" to expanding the facility's total barley production from its initial 1.9-million-bushel capacity.

The facility will co-produce a high-energy

liquid feed supplement for cattle feeders.

"We look forward to making this investment in both Jerome and the state of Idaho," Olson stated in a news release. "This facility and innovative barley product will create a new market and greater stability for farmers in the Magic Valley region and throughout Idaho."

The new operation is a partnership between Scoular and Montana Microbial Products, which operates a plant in Melrose, Mont., and a research lab in Missoula, Mont., and developed the technology to create the barley protein concentrate.

Scoular is based out of Omaha, Neb., and has several grain handling facilities in Idaho, as well as the livestock ingredients facility in Jerome.

Using barley in aquaculture feed is an idea that the Idaho Barley Commission has researched, supported and encouraged for many years, Wilder said. ■



Idaho Farm Bureau file photo

Idaho and U.S. chickpea acres have decreased rapidly and have followed a sharp decline in farm-level prices for the crop.

Idaho, U.S. chickpea acres drop sharply

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – As farm-level prices for chickpeas have declined significantly the past two years, so have U.S. and Idaho chickpea acres.

More than half of all chickpeas, also known as garbanzo beans, produced in the United States are grown in Idaho and Washington.

U.S. chickpea acres began soaring starting in 2016, when they hit 325,000, up from 207,000 the previous year. They jumped to a record 603,000 acres in 2017

and then reached 850,000 in 2018.

That's when farm-level prices were near 40 cents a pound, but as prices began falling, so did acreage.

Total U.S. chickpea planted acreage fell to 450,000 in 2019 and planted acres this year are at 304,000, down 33 percent from last year, according to USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service.

NASS puts Idaho's total planted chickpea acreage at 73,000 in 2020, down 17 percent from 88,000 in 2019.

NASS estimates Idaho farmers planted 65,000 acres of large chickpeas this year, down from 68,000 last year, and 8,000

acres of small chickpeas, down from 20,000 in 2019.

Washington's total chickpea acreage in 2020 is estimated at 90,000, down 18 percent from 110,000 last year.

Dirk Hammond, administrative services manager for George F. Brocke and Sons, which processes pulse crops in Kendrick, Idaho, said the declining prices and acres are a result of oversupply.

"There is a lot of supply and not enough demand," he said.

The rapid rise in U.S. chickpea acres followed 2016 being dubbed "Year of the Chickpea." See **CHICKPEAS**, page 24

Idaho Farm Bureau

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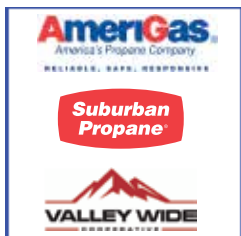
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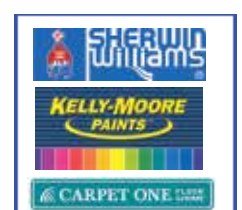
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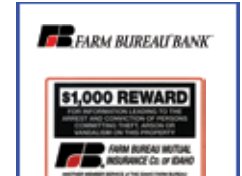
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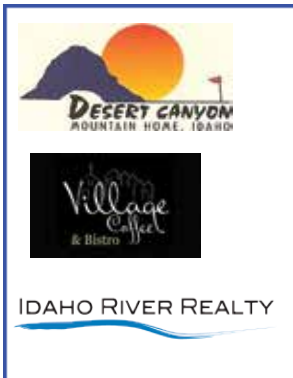
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Variable retention silvicultural systems

By Chris Schnepf
University of Idaho

Silviculture – the “culture of forests” – includes all practices used to reach forest management objectives, including harvesting, planting, and thinning.

A “silvicultural system” is a specific system of practices designed to maintain the types of forests we wish to perpetuate, based on a solid understanding of forest ecology.

Four classic silvicultural systems are widely used with variations. The clearcut, seed tree, and shelterwood silvicultural systems regenerate and tend an even-aged stand.

Many Inland Northwest stands were even-aged, due to stand-replacing fires. Typically, these systems include one pre-commercial thinning (cut trees are too small to be taken to a mill) and at least one



Photo by Chris Schnepf

Regardless of silvicultural system, always leave the best-formed trees.

commercial thinning.

By contrast, the selection silvicultural system is designed for an uneven aged stand – classically an all-aged stand, with many younger trees and progressively fewer older trees.

In response to concerns about social acceptability and ecological sustainability, some scientists, particularly in coastal forests, have been experimenting over the last 20 years with silvicultural approaches that do not fit precisely within these classic systems, and seek to retain or develop more of the structures and functions of older forests, particularly on public lands.

This is the first of two articles to provide a primer for these techniques.

Variable retention harvesting (VR), which some describe as a silvicultural system, is defined in the SAF Dictionary of Forestry as “an approach to harvesting based on the retention of structural elements or biological legacies from the harvested stand for integration into the new stand to achieve various ecological objectives....”

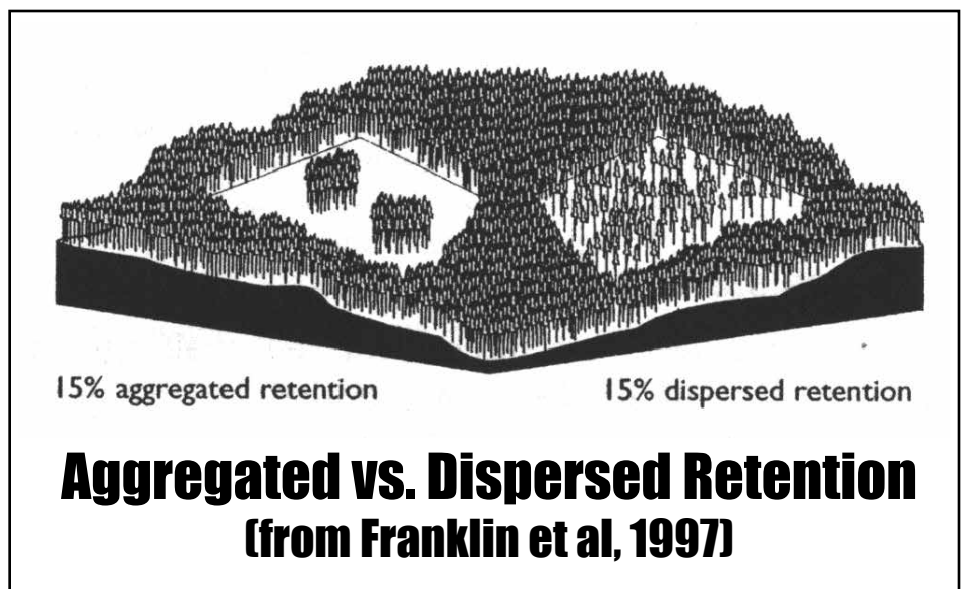
A biological legacy is “an organism, a reproductive portion of an organism, or a biologically derived structure or pattern inherited from a previous ecosystem ... biological legacies often include large trees, snags, undisturbed forest floor, and downed logs left after harvesting to provide refugia and to structurally enrich the new stand.” However, retained green trees often get the most attention in discussions of VR.

There are two broad types of VR – “dispersed” and “aggregated.”

Dispersed retention “retains trees, structures or biological legacies in a dispersed or uniform pattern.”* It could look superficially similar to a shelterwood harvest, except that the retained trees are left through the next rotation or longer (normally a shelterwood system would remove seed trees after establishing regeneration).

Aggregated retention retains intact forest patches within the harvest unit. Aggregates are usually smaller than 2.5 acres in size.

Aggregated retention benefits include leaving portions of the forest floor intact, leaving soft snags in a way that does not threaten logger safety, and allowing more



light into the unit for shade intolerant species.

Substantial area influenced by green trees

It is fair to talk about leaving these elements on a broader landscape scale, but VR is fundamentally about leaving green trees within the management unit.

This is usually phrased in terms of area influenced by green trees. For example, a Canadian author** specifies that VR harvests “leave more than half the total area of the cut block within one tree height from the base of a tree or group of trees, whether or not the tree or group of trees is inside the cut block.”

In other words, at least half of the harvest area should be within 100-200 feet (the height of a dominant mature tree for that site) of a tree.

Did Inland Northwest disturbances leave as many green trees as coastal disturbances?

Variable retention proponents point to the number of green trees left scattered through coastal forests after fires. While we share many of the same species as coastal forests, Inland Northwest disturbance patterns are different.

Moist forests in the Inland Northwest burned in a mosaic pattern, but green trees left after these fires were distributed differently. In many if not most Inland Northwest fire events, there would have been many 5 acre or larger (sometimes much larger) patches with no green trees.

To the extent VR’s goal is to mimic historical disturbance patterns, we would perhaps need to create some areas that do not fully meet the green tree influence standards discussed in coastal VR applications.

VR: an excellent recipe to grow grand fir

Retained trees will influence tree seedling regeneration. One of their larger influences will be shade – and for many more years than under seed tree or shelterwood systems, where overstory trees are removed after regeneration is established.

More shade favors shade-tolerant species such as grand fir and Douglas-fir, which are often problematic to the extent they host a broad array of tree-killing insects and diseases. Retained trees will also slow the growth of regeneration to some degree.

Some of this may be countered by aggregating retention and aggressively pre-commercial thinning against shade tolerant species, but there may be limits to how much you can compensate, especially on shadier north-facing slopes. Advocates of VR emphasize its flexibility for different contexts. Growing shade-intolerant species, such as larch, may require opening stands up more than typical VR prescriptions for coastal forests.

Is variable retention another way to high-grade?

One can leave some small trees to meet VR standards, but advocates emphasize

that VR is not high-grading (leaving only the smallest trees). The emphasis is on leaving dominant trees as biological legacies – not only for genetics, but also for what they contribute to forest function as they age, die, become snags, then eventually fall to the ground and provide coarse woody debris.

‘Use the forest, Luke’

Many Idaho forest owners are already practicing some degree of VR if they have a stream going through their property. Idaho forest practice laws require leaving some green trees along streams to sustain riparian function.

This points to a key VR theme: locating the most strategic places to retain trees, sometimes referred to as control points or anchor points. For example:

Which areas of the site are wetter and can better support shade-tolerant regeneration?

Which areas are challenging to plant, or have wildlife habitat features to keep (more snags, talus slopes, or other habitats)?

Where would retained trees fit best with the most efficient and least damaging paths to remove logs?

Are there areas with unique plant habitats that you want to protect (e.g., bogs)?

Conclusion

Aversion to clearcuts has become so culturally ingrained that some believe keeping a social license to practice forestry requires leaving more green trees in stand regeneration harvests.

Variable retention may not fit with all owners’ objectives, but elements of VR are appealing to family forest owners, particularly those who like having some large “legacy” trees on the property.

For more detailed information on VR, see these references for this article:

*Franklin, J.F., D.R. Berg, D.A. Thornburg, J.C. Tappeiner. 1997. Alternative silvicultural approaches to timber harvesting: variable retention harvest systems. In: Kohm, K.A. and J.F. Franklin (Eds.) 1997. *Creating a Forestry for the 21st Century*. Island Press, Washington, DC, pp. 111-140.

**Mitchel, S.J. and W.J. Beese. 2002. The retention system: reconciling variable retention with the principles of silvicultural systems. *The Forestry Chronicle* 78(3): 397-403.

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. ■

CHICKPEAS

Continued from page 19

Pulses” by the United Nations.

In Idaho, chickpea acreage expanded from 70,000 in 2015 to 92,000 in 2016, then 118,000 in 2017 and 134,000 in 2018.

During that time, chickpeas were on a roll in the United States, as demand, acres and prices continued to increase together for several years in a row.

But U.S. and Idaho chickpea acreage fell sharply during 2019 and 2020 as prices went from roughly 40 cents per pound all the way down to 16 cents per pound, which is below what many farmers need to break even, Hammond said.

The acreage declines “are all driven because those producer-level prices went from the 40s to 16 cents,” he said.

The price decline started happening after India, the world’s largest consumer of chickpeas, slapped tariffs on several products, including garbanzos. At about the same time, China also closed its market to chickpeas for about 18 months.

“At the same time that acres reached their highest level ever, we suffered the loss of two major markets,” Hammond said. “It was a perfect storm of historically high production and the loss of two major markets....”



Idaho Farm Bureau file photo

Idaho and U.S. chickpea acres have decreased rapidly and have followed a sharp decline in farm-level prices for the crop.

Craig Fleener, a farmer in Moscow, Idaho, didn’t plant any chickpeas this year, partly because of a tough harvest year in 2019 due to late rains, but mostly because of the price drop.

“That’s the main thing,” he said. “The price drop was very dramatic. That’s just

not enough money.”

Hammond said that farmers and industry leaders are hopeful the dramatic drop in acreage might soon lead to a bump in prices.

“With fewer supplies and fewer acres, we’re hoping we might see a little bit of a price increase with garbs,” he said. ■

Scholarships



Submitted photo
These five youth were chosen to receive scholarships by the Bannock County Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers program. The YF&R group invited all people in FFA or 4-H showing animals – beef cattle, pigs, sheep, goats and horses – at the Bannock County Fair to participate in the group's 5th annual scholarship program. Scholarships were awarded to help offset the cost of showing the animals. The following five youth shown above, out of 15 people who submitted written essays, were chosen to receive scholarships: 1st place, Ethan Symons (pink bucket, \$400); 2nd place, Jaylee Howell (green bucket, \$300); 3rd place, Sunni Barnes (blue bucket, \$200); 4th place, Kodi Hansen (purple bucket, \$100); 5th place, Kimberly Hancock (red bucket, \$50).

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Rick Forestier, the winner of our second quarter Refer A Friend, Get A Gift \$500 drawing, with his agent Jolene Zollinger.



Photo by John O'Connell

Rex Baker pitches feed to his workhorses, which earn their keep by pulling wagons, supporting agritourism at the Baker ranch in Lava Hot Springs.

Agritourism

Couple opens Lava Hot Springs farm and ranch to agritourism

By John O'Connell

Intermountain Farm and Ranch

LAVA HOT SPRINGS — Rex Baker came up with the idea that saved his small family farm and ranch while he was selectively logging trees within his pasture to generate some extra income.

It was 1992 and he'd just been laid off from Union Pacific Railroad — a job that also helped support his Baker Ranch. As he was thinning trees, however, he thought

about how much he enjoyed the scenic beauty of the landscape and realized others might pay to spend some time in such an idyllic setting.

Located about 2 miles south of Lava Hot Springs off of Dempsey Creek Road, Baker Ranch is now well known by people from throughout the region, and agricultural tourism is its life's blood.

During winter, church and youth groups, families and groups of friends head to Baker Ranch to snow shoe, cross country ski and

tube down a nice-sized sledding hill. Adjacent to the hill — which is about a half-mile snowshoe trek from the road — is a heated warming hut, where groups can take a picnic break or spend a lazy afternoon watching the kids zoom by on their tubes.

Rex Baker, who is a fourth-generation farmer and rancher, and his wife Peggy Ann derive most of their agri-tourism income, however, from summer wagon rides. Their powerful workhorses pull wagonloads of visitors throughout the property, stopping at



Photo by John O'Connell

Patrons come from all over to cross country ski, snowshoe and sled at Baker Ranch during the winter.

a creekside for a large western dinner and an evening of entertainment.

They also sell flats of their homegrown raspberries and homemade raspberry jam, produced in their certified kitchen, from their ranch and at the Portneuf Valley Farmers Market.

"It makes a pretty interesting life for us," Rex Baker said. "We enjoy people. Our clientele is great."

Not one to be sedentary, Rex Baker has also started a fencing company and has a waiting list from customers ranging from working ranchers to residential property owners seeking to add ambiance to their ranchettes. Nowadays, he also draws a railroad pension.

Rex Baker raises enough dry-land alfalfa to feed his own horses and about 40 ewes belonging to his daughter, Autumn. Autumn, who works at Idaho State University, raises royal whites, which are a breed of hair sheep known for their outstanding taste. She sells the lambs in the fall directly to customers, who typically have them butchered at a Blackfoot facility.

The Bakers lease most of their pasture to a friend, who runs about 50 cow-calf pairs on the land.

"A lot of people are really kind of wanting to get back to nature a little bit," Rex Baker said. "They really appreciate seeing the sheep and the big horses pulling because they have no concept of that. They get on these wagons and they've never been around (workhorses), and they're just absolutely amazed by the power of these horses."

Rex Baker's great-grandfather, an Australian immigrant named Jesse Baker, homesteaded in 1896 near the former town of Dempsey, which is now Lava Hot springs. Rex Baker's grandfather, Alfred Baker, eventually took over the family business and sold the land around 1945. Rex Baker's parents, Harold and Lucil Baker, had worked for Alfred Baker herding sheep and bought 170 acres of the original ranch when Alfred Baker sold out.

"Most of it had to be broken out. It was all sage brush," Rex Baker said.

About 15 years later, they bought another 500 acres. Rex Baker continued the family's legacy, renting the property from his mother for about five years before purchasing it in 1976 to raise cattle.

"We did that for about 35 years, with outside work to keep it going," Rex Baker said. "We sold the cattle about 15 years ago and

focused more on our agri-tourism business and kind of jumped in with both feet."

The winter activities were added to the list of offerings at Baker Ranch shortly after they sold their cattle.

Rex Baker explained he and his wife have always enjoyed snowshoeing throughout the 170-acre property. They eventually marked public trails and brought in a ticket office.

"We kind of liked it and it was good exercise," he said. "We thought, 'Heck, maybe other people would kind of enjoy this.'"

There's a half-mile cross country skiing trail through the dry-land farm and a mile loop through steeper pasture for snowshoeing.

They leave tubes and sleds by the warming hut, which they added a few years later. The trail fee is \$8, and they rent snowshoes for \$7 and snow boots for \$5. They stay open as long as there's good snow and usually have to close by the start of March, when conditions become too "sticky."

Trish Phelps, of Blackfoot, made her first trip to snowshoe at Baker Ranch about a month ago. She enjoyed the solitude of the ranch, so she returned on a recent Saturday with a friend, Sandy Medina, of Pocatello.

See **AGRITOURISM**, page 33



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Farm Bureau members urged to go from ‘good to better to best’

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

KELLOGG – Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President Bryan Searle told fellow IFBF volunteer leaders July 21 that it was a privilege to work alongside them in working to strengthen the state’s largest general farm organization.

“You belong to the greatest agricultural organization there is,” Searle, a farmer from Shelley, said during IFBF’s County Presidents Summer Conference.

The annual event was held July 21-22 in Kellogg and was attended by presidents of county Farm Bureau organizations throughout Idaho. All of IFBF’s county Farm Bureau presidents are actively involved in farming or ranching.

Searle said one of the federation’s top goals is to help strengthen the county Farm Bureau organizations and provide their members the tools they need to continue to protect, promote and grow the state’s agricultural industry.

“Without strong county (Farm Bureaus), we’re weak,” he said. “The whole goal is to strengthen our counties....”

Searle also praised the grassroots members that drive the various county, state and national Farm Bureau organizations and give them their marching orders.

“Farm Bureau is strong and Farm Bureau is strong because of the grassroots members,” he said.

But Searle and other presenters also encouraged county Farm Bureau presidents and other IFBF volunteers to continue to grow and expand in their personal and professional lives and pledged that Farm Bureau’s professional staff would help them accomplish that.

“I believe ... your full potential as a Farm Bureau leader is unlimited,” he said.

IFBF CEO Zak Miller, a farmer from St. Anthony, said the organization has phenomenal leaders in every county and he challenged them to continue to improve.

“Our leadership is good but ... it can be great and it will be,” he said. “Our leadership is improving at the grassroots and it must continue to improve. That’s one of my visions.”

Miller also pledged to continue to strengthen the already-strong Farm Bureau brand.

“All I care about is when people see that brand, they think, ‘That company cares about Idaho,’” he said. “I want that brand to mean good things in the mind of anybody that comes across it. I believe we’re on the right track but we’re going to devote resources to grow that brand even stronger.”

Todd Argall, who took over as CEO of Farm Bureau Mutual Insurance Co. of Idaho last November, encouraged Farm Bureau’s employees and volunteer leaders to go from “good to better to best.”



Photo by Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation Vice President Richard Durrant makes a point during IFBF’s annual County Presidents Summer Conference, which was held July 21-22 in Kellogg.

“Wherever you are at, do not settle. Keep striving to be the best,” he said.

Argall said the insurance company has adopted the “good to better to best” adage as a theme “because we’re good in a lot of areas, we’re better in a lot of areas, but we have work to do to go from better to best.”

IFBF Vice President Richard Durrant reminded conference participants of the important role that policy development plays within the organization. Idaho Farm Bureau Federation policy is developed by actual farmers and ranchers, at the grassroots level, and serves as the marching orders for IFBF staff.

He encouraged volunteers to do their due diligence and ensure policies that are adopted benefit all of agriculture.

“We need to work together to make sure we get the best policy possible in our policy book,” said Durrant, a farmer from Meridian. “Let’s continue to implement good policy.”

IFBF leaders also talked about the important role that young producers play in the organization and applauded the work the group’s Young Farmers and Ranchers program is doing in helping develop their talents.

“The Young Farmers and Ranchers program is changing Farm Bureau for the better,” said Brody Miller, IFBF’s director of member relations and a regional manager in southwest Idaho. “This YF&R program is developing leaders.”

When Searle asked county presidents to stand up if they had been through or were involved in the YF&R program, about half of the people in the room stood up.

“That’s pretty impressive,” he said. “What great opportunities there are in the YF&R program. We continue to see it grow and strengthen.” ■

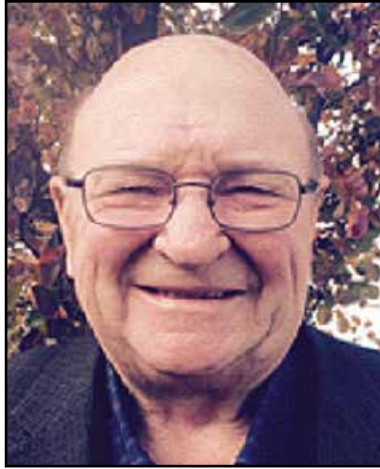
Grain harvest, prices look promising for 2020

The grain harvest this year proved to be very good for most producers, with reports of higher than expected yields and good quality. Prices were reflecting the fact that we have a good supply of most classes of wheat as well as barley. Producers harvested more than enough barley to cover their malt contracts and we saw the balance hit the feed market.

With the flour mills rolling some of their old crop contracts into the new crop months, the demand for wheat at harvest was less than normal. We saw wheat being stored in bins that hadn't been used for a few years for the simple fact that prices at harvest weren't anything to write home about.

The local feedlots in southeast Idaho were very competitive with their bids and producers were able to contract wheat for delivery into the fall months. We were forced into contracting into the fall and early winter months for the fact the supply into the harvest months was more than adequate to meet their needs. The demand into the feeds could increase as feeders continue to increase the numbers in their feedlots.

Don't be lulled to sleep thinking that things will get back to normal and the flour mills and feedlots will need to come into the market to buy wheat as we move into the spring months. The markets, especially this year, can



and will change every day. Rest assured that when someone sticks their head up to buy, someone will be there to sell and fill that hole in the market.

As the potato and beet harvests wind down, producers will need to get their grain marketing plan back in place.

Yes, I did say back in place as I know that when you are in the heat of the battle with harvest it is difficult to even think about your grain marketing program. However, it is usually at the time when everyone else is thinking about other things that your opportunities will present themselves.

It will be important for you to contract your wheat into the deferred months as that is where the buyers are. If you wait for November to start looking at the markets, the bids will be for delivery in the February and March time frame.

The basis has the potential to strengthen a little into the end of November but keep in mind that both in Portland and southeast Idaho there are ample supplies so I wouldn't look for large moves higher in the basis. The exception to this could be in protein wheat classes for delivery into the Pacific Northwest.

We have seen the cattle markets rebound from the lows this past spring to levels that will give producers the opportunity to contract their calves at profitable levels. However, just as in

the grain markets you can't get lulled into thinking what just happened can't happen again.

If you usually keep your calves to market at a later date and higher weight you will still need to protect your price risk using some of the hedging tools that are available to you. Remember, hedging your calves is protecting you from an adverse price movement in the market. Hedging will reduce the peaks and valleys and to quote one cattle feeder, "hedging gives me the opportunity to relax just a little."

I would like to give you a couple of examples of wheat producers who used their knowledge to contract their wheat ahead of time at levels that protected them in the market.

First, we had producers that locked in the futures side of their wheat price back before the virus moved the futures lower. They will be final pricing their wheat and delivering in the next six weeks and at this time their futures price is 30 cents over the current market.

The other producers in the PNW used basis-only contracts on their soft white when the basis was in the areas of 100 over the futures. This is about 70 cents over the current basis level, giving them the opportunity to price their wheat at 70 cents over the current level.

Remember, there are 12 months in a marketing year and these months can be the 12 months prior to your desired delivery months.

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



Submitted photo

Cargo is moved down the Columbia-Snake River system.

Wheat farmers applaud final environmental review of Columbia-Snake River system

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – A final environmental impact statement by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and Bonneville Power Administration reaffirmed the federal agencies’ opposition to breaching the four lower Snake River dams on the Columbia-Snake River system.

Some environmental groups support breaching the dams as a way to improve salmon runs and in response to a lawsuit brought by dam removal supporters, a federal judge ordered the federal agencies

that operate the river system to review all reasonable options for operating it in order to minimize the impact on endangered salmon.

On July 31, the agencies released the final EIS and the report reaffirmed their opposition to breaching the dams. That opposition was quickly applauded by members of Idaho’s wheat industry, which is highly dependent on the Columbia-Snake River system

Wheat is the No. 1 crop in the Pacific Northwest – Idaho, Oregon and Washington – in terms of total acres and the Columbia-Snake River system is the top wheat export gateway in the United States.

About 58 percent of the nation’s wheat destined for export travels by barge through the river system, which also produces about 60 percent of the electric power used in the region.

Removing the dams would make the river system unnavigable for barges that move wheat, barley and other products to port for export.

“It’s always a relief to have those agencies reaffirm what you believe; the science is on our side,” said “Genesee” Joe Anderson, a North Idaho wheat farmer. “The Columbia-Snake system is critical to the Pacific Northwest wheat industry. The barging system allows us to have a really

high level of service and efficiency for (our export customers).”

Wheat is grown in 42 of Idaho’s 44 counties and is the state’s No. 2 crop in terms of total revenue. Half of the wheat grown in Idaho is exported, almost all of it through the Columbia-Snake River system, which is the third largest grain export gateway in the world.

If the dams were breached, it would add about another 50 cents per bushel in transportation costs for PNW wheat growers, Anderson said.

“Another 50 cents a bushel for transportation costs would be quite likely and that would drive a lot of farmers out of business,” he said.

North Idaho wheat farmer Bill Flory said the EIS’ opposition to dam breaching was great news for Idaho farmers, especially wheat farmers.

If the dams were breached, “We would lose a competitive edge we have and the efficiency of moving grain by barge as opposed to by rail or truck,” he said. “Revenue per bushel would decrease and that would translate into less revenue per acre for the farmer.”

A report released in January that was commissioned by the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association found that removing the lower four dams on the Snake River would threaten the existence of at least 1,100 farms in Idaho, Washington and Oregon.

The PNWA also applauded the final EIS’ opposition to dam breaching in a news release.

“Removal of the Snake River dams would cut off trade access for our region’s farmers and severely impact their ability to efficiently and safely move their prod-

ucts,” the PNWA news release states.

It also noted that in 2018 alone, 149,970 trucks and 38,966 rail cars would have been needed to move the cargo that was barged on the Snake River, and that removing the dams would more than double the region’s risk of power shortages and lead to an additional 1.3 million metric tons of carbon dioxide annually.

According to the PNWA release, the EIS also found that breaching the dams would require massive investments to replace the barging system with rail and trucking infrastructure and would severely impact the cruise industry that brings an estimated 25,000 passengers up and down the river system each year.

“Removing the dams would have really broad impacts on a number of economies, not just the agricultural economy,” Flory said. ■

AGRITOURISM

Continued from page 27

“I just like the easy pace of it, that there’s really no rush to make it through. It’s quiet, and you don’t have a lot of people,” Phelps said.

The summer trail rides are \$40 for adults, and discounted rates are offered to children, based on age. The trail ride season runs from the weekend after Memorial Day through the end of September.

The ranch has four wagons — a friend built the prototype, which Rex Baker tweaked. He and his brother-in-law then built the fleet up to four wagons, in addition to making a few that they’ve sold over the years.

They take groups of 30 to 70 people on their wagon rides, which use the logging trails created back when Rex Baker selectively harvested his 500-acre property. A roughly 40-minute ride ends by a creek and a pavilion, where dinner and live country western music are waiting.

“It’s getting busier and busier,” Rex Baker said. “People are finding out about us.”

Rex Baker laments that much of the agricultural land surrounding Baker Ranch, including a good part of his grandfather’s



Photo by John O’Connell

Baker Ranch rents snowshoes and snow boots for use on the ranch.

original ranch, has been developed.

“That’s kind of happened all over Dempsey. There’s really not too many ranchers around here, truth of the matter,” he said.

“We’re kind of getting to be the last hurrah.”

To make a reservation or for more information, visit <http://www.bakerranchlava.com/> or call 208-776-5684. ■



U.S. Air Force photo

An F-15E Strike Eagle from Mountain Home Air Force Base engages the afterburners Aug. 18, during training. Air Force officials and Idaho Farm Bureau Federation worked together to alert ranchers and farmers in the Bruneau area about an upcoming training exercise that could impact GPS devices.

Farm Bureau, Air Force work together to alert producers of military exercise

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE – Idaho Farm Bureau Federation leaders thanked the U.S. Air Force for reaching out to the state’s agricultural community to let them know that GPS devices could be impacted during military training exercises held in the Bruneau area in September.

Mountain Home Air Force Base public affairs officials contacted IFBF and asked the organization to help alert producers in the area about the training exercises, which were set to be held between Sept. 1-4 and Sept. 8-11 around the general Bruneau and base area.

Air Force officials and IFBF worked together to help spread the word to farmers and ranchers that tractors and other devices that rely on the use of the Global Positioning System could malfunction during the exercises.

“We anticipate that at points between 9

a.m. and 5:30 p.m. on these dates, devices in that area that rely on GPS may malfunction,” a Mountain Home AFB news release stated. “Those who have agricultural equipment or other devices may be impacted during this time....”

Capt. Margaret Kealy-Machella, a spokeswoman for Mountain Home AFB, told IFBF that the Air Force understands how important agriculture is to the state and wanted to do everything possible to minimize any potential impacts on farmers and ranchers.

“We want to be sure that we inform those in our amazing agriculture community” about the potential impacts, she said.

IFBF President Bryan Searle, a farmer from Shelley, applauded the Air Force for thinking about the state’s farm producers and helping ensure any impact on them was minimized.

“We really appreciate the fact that Air Force officials took the time and effort to reach out to Idaho’s agricultural commu-

nity to inform them of these exercises and their potential to disrupt GPS devices,” he said. “We are more than happy to work on this effort in conjunction with the men and women who protect this great nation.”

Bruneau is in Owyhee County. According to the most recent Census of Agriculture data, there are about 578 farms and 749,000 acres of farmland in the county.

This is the second time in the past two years that Air Force officials have reached out to Farm Bureau to let them know about the exercises.

“We thank you for your patience and understanding as we undertake a critical training mission to ensure our readiness and national defense,” the Mountain Home AFB news release stated. “This training ensures that we are prepared for real-world combat and remain lethal and agile.”

Mountain Home AFB has more than 4,800 military, civilian employees and families and is home to three fighter squadrons and 62 F-15 fighter jets. ■

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Growers see potential for solid potato market, with COVID-19 as the wildcard

By John O'Connell

Intermountain Farm and Ranch

Shelley farmer Bart Wattenbarger was banking on a strong market to help him recover from a widespread early season freeze last fall that destroyed about 30% of his potato crop.

For a while after the 2019 harvest, things looked good, with a manageable potato supply leading to decent returns to growers and rising prices of fresh 50-pound cartons used by the foodservice industry.

Then COVID-19 hit and after an initial price escalation for retail potatoes caused

by supply chain constrictions, the market unraveled.

Processors cut contracts, farmers returned unneeded seed to their seed potato suppliers and growers with no markets for their surplus spuds made national headlines by giving them away to local struggling families.

As he prepares for this fall's harvest, Wattenbarger believes the table is once again set for a manageable spud supply, a high-quality crop and a good market.

The wildcard, however, remains COVID-19.

Some farmers have already begun digging in East Idaho growing areas with

sandy soil, such as Fort Hall, and they've been killing vines elsewhere in preparation for harvest.

The region's farmers are generally reporting excellent tuber quality and average yields.

"It had been five years since we had made much money at all on the farm and we were looking forward to a prosperous year last year," Wattenbarger said. "In February, that market crashed. It took the wind out of the sails for every farmer around here. We were all excited a month before that, and then everybody was in depression mode almost."

A small decrease in supply can make a

significant difference in price for specialty crops such as potatoes, and Idaho growers anticipate starting this fall with a much smaller volume of spuds compared with recent years.

USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service estimated Idaho farmers planted 300,000 acres of spuds this season — down 10,000 acres from 2019 — driven largely by major contract cuts from processors.

A grower organization that surveyed planted acreage by visiting and observing each field in the state estimated the crop is even smaller, at 295,790 acres.

Potato prices that crashed after the coronavirus forced shutdowns of restaurants and foodservice buyers have since rebounded somewhat.

USDA Market News reported on Aug. 25 the price of five, 10-pound mesh sacks of Russet Norkotahs from the Upper Valley, Twin Falls-Burley District was \$6.50 to \$7.50, and 50-count Norkotah cartons were selling for \$16 to \$19.50.

"I think it's all based on COVID," Wattenbarger said. "If we can control that, I believe we have a good market coming. If we have a flareup and shut down again, that was a disaster for the farmers."

Wattenbarger planned to kill his vines on Aug. 28 and start harvesting on Sept. 21. Based on his test digging, he believes his crop will have excellent quality.

"I think yields are going to be kind of an average yield — maybe a field here or there might be a little above average," he said. "I believe we are in a situation that warrants a good market."

Wattenbarger reduced his planted potato acreage by 17% this season, shifting to spring wheat. He sells fresh potatoes to Shelley-based GPOD of Idaho, which ships a large volume to New York, where many small restaurants remain closed or have gone out of business due to COVID-19.

Pingree farmer Garth Van Orden was hit with a 20% reduction in his contract with a potato processor; he also cut back his fresh potato acreage by 10%, planting soft white spring wheat in their place.

Van Orden, who farms on sandy soil, started harvesting Norkotahs for the fresh market on Aug. 15. Despite some early



Photos courtesy of Garth Van Orden Farms
Potatoes are harvested this year at Garth Van Orden Farms in Pingree. Idaho spud farmers think 2020 has the potential to be a solid potato market but COVID-19 looms as a wildcard.

season frost, his spuds have recovered, and he's harvesting an average-yielding crop with terrific quality.

"It's OK. It's not a huge crop. It's not disappointing either," Van Orden said. "I'm just trend line or slightly below that."

Van Orden said farmers in East Idaho have benefited from better weather throughout the growing season than last year, and he's aiming to finish harvest in a more timely manner to avoid the risk of an early frost, following last season's experience.

"We've got a manageable crop coming. I say that as an industry," Van Orden said. "Growers, processors, fresh sheds, we all went through the rollercoaster of, 'There's not going to be any business,' to where we couldn't keep up. We were short, we were long, and now we're actually short again."

He said this fall's crop should be ample, but Van Orden also doubts there will be anything extra. Overall, he believes the crop has a slightly smaller size profile, which should drive up prices of larg-

er-sized fresh cartons.

With most of the crop still in the ground, Travis Blacker, industry relations director for the Idaho Potato Commission, sees evidence already that it should be a good year for the potato market.

Blacker said growing conditions have been outstanding, and the state's reduction in acreage should pay dividends with better returns.

"I've been over to Glens Ferry, Wilder and Egin this week, and everything I've seen is looking very good as far as quality. I haven't heard anything as far as yields, but the quality looks fantastic," Blacker said. "I'm pretty optimistic that it's going to be a good year."

Blacker said IPC will adjust its programs to market the crop according to this season's unique circumstances. And he acknowledges there are always "wildcards" that could emerge and change the outlook.

"I think we're all praying we get the crop in and who knows what's going to happen this year?" he said. ■



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