

Idaho Farm Bureau. Quarterly

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Farmers & Ranchers Have Massive Impact On Idaho Economy





Bringing the balance back

As a father, grandfather, farmer and man of faith, balance has become a cornerstone of my life.

I have come to appreciate how crucial balance is in every aspect, from managing my time on the farm and with family to spending time on the road and seeing my second family, the Farm Bureau family.

The same idea also goes for farming – in order to keep our farms running smoothly, it can become a real balancing act. When one part is out balance, it can create a domino effect and lead

to bigger problems down the road. In both life and farming, balance is essential for maintaining stability and success.

Our nation's government was designed with balance in mind, each of the three branches having equal power to stabilize our democracy. The Founding Fathers knew that this balance was essential to ensure that no single branch would go unchecked.

But over the past 40 years that balance has been thrown off by a judicial doctrine known as

See **DUVALL**, page 6

The President's Desk

By **Bryan Searle**
President Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



Report captures farming's big impact on economy

One of the things that a farmer or rancher has no control over is the weather and diseases.

This year has been a challenging one, with damaging winds and frost to crops across the state. This year has also seen low farm-level commodity prices that are well below what it costs a farmer to produce them.

Farmers face challenges every year but this year is shaping up to be an especially challenging one for many Idaho farmers.

In addition to farm-level prices being below

the cost of production for several of Idaho's main farm commodities, the weather has not been especially nice to many agricultural producers in the state in 2024.

In some instances, sugar beets have had to be replanted three or four times due to wind or frost, which has impacted other crops as well.

The dairy industry has been hit with the avian influenza that reduces milk production for a few weeks as the cattle make their way through the sickness.

See **SEARLE**, page 7

Inside Farm Bureau

By **Zak Miller**
CEO Idaho Farm Bureau Federation



We do what we love

It is such a curious thing to watch a group of farmers and ranchers leave their ranch or farm to travel to a meeting to discuss how to support farming and ranching.

This phenomenon deserves a bit of contemplation.

What motivates someone in some of the busiest times of the year to walk away from their occupation to donate their time to creating better opportunities for everyone in their same line of work?

I have been searching for years for adequate words to express what motivates these fantastic people to do this work, and I think I have finally found them.

To be forthright, these are not my words at all. Recently, in a panel discussion among farmers and ranchers who are also industry leaders, one panelist explained why some are willing to serve: "I love agriculture and I love America, and that's why I'm here."

See **MILLER**, page 6

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COVER: A new, updated report shows the massive impact that agriculture has on Idaho's economy, and it all begins with the state's 22,000-plus farms and ranches. Here, a farm family in Franklin County is shown standing in front of a safflower field. See page 4 for story.
Photo by Jacob Christensen



Idaho Farm Bureau Federation photo
The total value of Idaho agricultural exports rose 10 percent during the first quarter of 2024. See story on page 32.

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Report shows massive impact of ag on Idaho's economy

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Agriculture is a massive part of Idaho's overall economy and it is still growing, according to a University of Idaho report released this year.

The report shows that agriculture in Idaho was directly and indirectly responsible for \$37.5 billion in sales in 2022, which equaled 17 percent of the state's total economic output.

"That \$37 billion is a big number," said the report's author, U of I professor Phil Watson. "That's pretty significant."

Titled "Economic Contribution of Idaho Agriculture," the report also found that agriculture was responsible for 126,800 jobs in Idaho in 2022, which amounted to one in every nine jobs in the state.

It found that agriculture accounted for 12.8 percent of Idaho's total gross state

product, which is a broad measurement of the total value of all goods and services.

"There's no question a lot of the economy in Idaho is tied to agriculture," Watson said.

The report, which is conducted by Watson every three or four years, was released in early January this year to state lawmakers as they convened in Boise for the start of the 2024 legislative session.

The report is based on several sources, including data from USDA and the US Bureau of Economic Analysis.

It is based on 2022 data and updates a previous report by Watson that was based on 2019 data.

The previous report also showed that Idaho agriculture was responsible for 13% of Idaho's total GSP.

"Agriculture, and all its supporting industries, literally are the backbone of the state's economy and way of life."

—Andi Woolf-Weibye, executive director,
Idaho Bean Commission



Watson said it is significant that agriculture's contribution to Idaho's overall economy remains steady even while the state has one of the fastest-growing economies in the nation.

"The state's economy is growing really fast and agriculture is keeping up," he said. "Ag isn't falling away here, like it is in other states. Agriculture in Idaho is still growing."

Watson said the report is meant to show lawmakers and others the important role that agriculture plays in Idaho.

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President Bryan Searle said the report certainly does that.

"The numbers and data contained in this report are huge but not terribly surprising to people involved in the state's agricultural industry," said Searle, who farms in Shelley. "Idaho's overall economy is supported by the state's 22,877 farms and ranches and the linked sectors that support them."



TOP: A potato field is irrigated in East Idaho. ABOVE: A new report shows the large impact that farming and ranching have on the state's overall economy. Idaho Farm Bureau Federation photos

“This report does a wonderful job of showing just how important farming and ranching is to Idaho,” said Andi Woolf-Weiby, executive director of the Idaho Bean Commission. “Agriculture, and all its supporting industries, literally are the backbone of the state’s economy and way of life.”

The report includes the direct and indirect impacts that agriculture has in the state.

For example, it would include the impact of fertilizer and farm equipment sales.

Not including indirect impacts, the report found that agriculture in Idaho alone was responsible for \$27 billion in sales in 2022, 73,470 jobs, and contributed \$9 billion to the state’s GSP.

“The big message from this report is that Idaho agriculture is incredibly important not only to Idaho’s economy but also to economies at the county level,” said Brett Wilder, a U of I agricultural economist.

“Agriculture is an incredibly large part of what we do in this state.”

The report also shows that agriculture in Idaho accounts for a much greater part of the state’s overall economy than it does in neighboring states.

It shows that even without including its indirect impacts, agriculture accounts for 7 % of Idaho’s total gross state product.

That is 4.3 times greater than in Wash-

ington, 14 times greater than in Nevada, three times greater than in Oregon, 4.2 times greater than in Utah, 3.6 times greater than in Wyoming, two times greater than in Montana, and 3.6 times greater than in the United States as a whole.

“When you look at the Pacific Northwest, Idaho really is the top state when it comes to agriculture,” Wilder said. ■

DUVALL

Continued from page 2

Chevron deference. This rule permitted federal agencies, rather than our courts, to determine the meaning of ambiguous federal statutes.

What does that mean for all of us who are not lawyers? Practically speaking, a federal agency becomes the ultimate authority on its own rules. No check, no balance.

Essentially, Chevron deference created a super-branch of government undermining the judiciary and legislative branches' role and multiplying the power of federal agencies.

A prime example of the overreach that came from Chevron deference is all too familiar to farmers and ranchers. It's none other than the Environmental Protection Agency's Waters of the United States Rule.

Within eight years, we saw three different sets of rules determining which waters fell under federal jurisdiction. This constant change left our farmers, homeowners and local governments in a state of uncertainty, making it impossible to plan for the long term due to ever-changing regulations.

Eventually, the Supreme Court unanimously struck down a key part of WOTUS, calling out the EPA for overstepping its legal authority. It was encouraging to see the highest court holding the EPA accountable for its overreach and shedding light on just how powerful federal agencies like the EPA had become.

Farm Bureau has been a leading voice of opposition against Chevron deference and has long argued on behalf of farmers who have been caught in the regulatory back and forth when administrations continually change the rules based on political agendas. The actual legislative process and laws themselves should rule the day.

We are pleased to see the court finally heard those concerns, and this month, struck down Chevron deference and restored balance.

This landmark ruling came after the oral arguments of the Relentless and Loper Bright cases back in January.

The court recognized that the National Marine Fisheries Service had overstepped its bounds when it required fishermen to pay for federal observers to monitor their fishing practices even though Congress never explicitly authorized the agency to charge the fishermen for the observers.

The Supreme Court's decision to overturn Chevron deference marks a pivotal moment in restoring the balance among the branches our Founding Fathers intended. By rejecting unchecked agency power, this ruling not only safeguards the rights of farmers and promotes regulatory clarity but also underscores the importance of democratic governance.

It will require lawmakers to be less vague in crafting legislation and ensures laws are interpreted on legal principles rather than agency opinions. While this decision represents a significant step forward, we must also keep in mind the work ahead to fully achieve this balance.

Congress must fulfill its constitutional role, upheld here by the court, by writing legislation that provides clarity to prevent becoming an even more litigious society.

For decades, our farmers have faced challenges posed by agency overreach, and this victory highlights how instrumental our advocacy has been in pushing for a balanced government and clear, understandable laws.

It also demonstrates, once again, the immense power of our collective voices when we stand together for what's right. ■

MILLER

Continued from page 2

Such a statement rings true because, for so many, agriculture is not just a profession; it is a passion and a duty.

Why do farmers and ranchers possess such strong passion and duty? It is easily argued that everything within a farmer or rancher that allows them to survive and thrive in agriculture comes from a keen sense of passion and duty.

Passion, by definition, is a strong, intense emotion or enthusiasm for something. I have seen very few hardened ranchers not get a quiver in their lip when they can't save a calf.

I also am reminded of the disgust you

'It is easily argued that everything within a farmer or rancher that allows them to survive and thrive in agriculture comes from a keen sense of passion and duty.'

see on a farmer's face after a rainstorm on ready-to-bale hay.

Sure, there is a profit-loss ratio adjustment involved in these scenarios, but I have never seen a farmer or rancher calculate the cost first.

The first feeling they have when these types of things happen comes from passion and their deep-seated love for what they

do, even when what they do sometimes breaks their hearts.

Duty, by definition, is a moral or legal obligation, a responsibility. Whether one is born into agriculture or chooses to enter, there are very few successful ranchers or farmers without a powerful sense of duty; literally, their occupation demands it.

Thirsty crops in the summer demand

water, hungry cattle must be fed, and soil must be cared for. There is no negotiation, no compromise on these things.

The tenets of agriculture are set and will not be changed. Agriculture demands duty-bound individuals or, to put it another way, an internal absolute obligation to fulfill a role or task, often linked to ethical or social expectations.

That is why it is so valuable to have farmers on school boards, in the state capital, and everywhere in-between.

Every day a rancher or farmer walks out their door, they are reminded about obligation, responsibility, accountability, and morals. No wonder some of my greatest heroes are farmers and ranchers.

SEARLE

Continued from page 2

But the good news is that farmers and ranchers will again contribute heavily to Idaho's economy this year, despite the many challenges.

That's because agricultural producers spend about the same amount of money to produce their commodities each year regardless of how much they make, or lose. That money spent by farmers helps underpin Idaho's economy, especially in rural areas.

For example, a potato farmer will spend roughly the same amount on seed, fertilizer, labor, etc., each year regardless of what they receive for their potatoes.

If a potato farmer receives less money for their potatoes in a given year, it doesn't change what it costs to grow those spuds.

This year is a good example of that.

Farm-level potato prices in 2024 are significantly lower than they have been in recent years and significantly below the cost of production.

Still, Idaho spud farmers continue to plug along and will again produce an abundant supply of potatoes for the nation this year.

That is the gamble and roller coaster of being involved in agriculture.

Idaho agriculture's consistent annual contribution to the economy is good news for the state's overall economy because a recent University of Idaho study shows that agriculture contributes heavily to Idaho's economy.

The report, which was released during the state's legislative session this year, shows that agriculture in Idaho was directly and indirectly responsible for \$37.5 billion dollars in sales in 2022.

That represented 17% of the state's overall sales.

Agriculture accounts for one in every nine jobs in the state as well. That's no small thing.

The report also shows that agriculture in Idaho contributes much more to the state's total gross state product than it does in surrounding states.

The U of I report shows that agriculture is responsible for 13% of Idaho's total gross state product.

The report, which is conducted every three or four years, is typically released during the first part of Idaho's legislative session

Why do farmers leave their farms to talk about farming? Why do organizations like the Farm Bureau work so hard to protect, defend, and support farmers?

Why do we need farmers to step forward to be among our leaders?

Perhaps Thomas Jefferson said it best in a letter to George Washington (both were well-known farmers): "Agriculture is our wisest pursuit because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals, and happiness."

When I focus on the essence of agriculture, especially good morals and happiness, I am reminded why we need our farmers and ranchers, and we need them for more than just our food. ■

to show legislators and other decision-makers in the state how important farming and ranching is to Idaho.

"There's no question a lot of the economy in Idaho is tied to agriculture," the report's author," U of I professor Phil Watson, told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation recently.

[See page 4 for a story on the report.]

So, while farmers and ranchers in Idaho have faced numerous challenges this year, the good news is that agriculture will again be a major part of Idaho's economy in 2024. ■

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Idaho Potato Commission photo

A potato field located in Idaho's 2nd Congressional District is shown with the Tetons in the background. The district is a national powerhouse when it comes to agricultural production.

Idaho's 2nd district a farming powerhouse

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Idaho's 2nd Congressional District is a national powerhouse when it comes to agriculture.

The state's 1st Congressional District is also big in agriculture but the 2nd district is one of the nation's mega districts when it comes to agriculture production.

Idaho has two congressional districts.

The 2nd district includes all of eastern Idaho and extends southwest and includes much of Boise city limits. It is represented by Rep. Mike Simpson.

The Republican congressman appreciates the huge role agriculture plays in the district and state, said Lexi Hamel, Simpson's communications director.

“As a fourth-generation Idahoan who grew up on a dairy farm, I am incredibly thankful for all the hard-working farmers, ranchers and producers who feed and fuel our nation.”

—Rep. Russ Fulcher

“We’re a very, very ag-heavy office,” she told Idaho Farm Bureau Federation recently for this story. “Even today, we were in a meeting and he was talking about dairy and how big it is in Idaho.”

Simpson is very much aware that agriculture is a big chunk of the state’s economy, as well as its way of life, she said.

“Idaho’s ag industry is truly remarkable and that’s something Mr. Simpson says all the time,” Hamel said. “Mr. Simpson is an avid advocate for Idaho agriculture.”

According to a University of Idaho study, agriculture was responsible for \$37.5 billion in sales, or 17 percent of the state’s total economic output, in 2022.

It was also responsible for one in every nine jobs in Idaho and 13 percent of the state’s total gross state product.

A sizable chunk of that economic output is due to the 11,825 farms located in the 2nd Congressional District.

According to USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service, \$8.5 billion worth of farm-gate revenue was generated by farmers in that district in 2022.

That ranked the district No. 11 overall among the nation’s 435 congressional districts in total farm-gate revenue.

The 2nd district also ranked very high nationally in several separate agriculture categories.

At \$2.85 billion, the district ranked No. 2 nationally in total value of sales of milk in 2022, according to NASS.

With 561,000 milk cows in the 2nd district in 2022, the dairy industry played a major role in the district’s overall ag sales ranking. But other commodities also did their part.

At \$1.02 billion, the district ranked No. 2 in total value of sales in a category that included hay production.

The second district ranked No. 3 in the nation in barley acreage, with 509,000 acres in 2022. The 1st Congressional District ranked No. 9 in that category with 29,000 acres.

Idaho leads the nation in total barley production because farmers in the state achieve much higher barley yields than farmers in other major barley producing states.

The 2nd district ranked No. 4 in the nation in total sales in a category labeled “vegetables, melons, potatoes and sweet potatoes,” with \$1.39 billion in sales in 2022.

That ranking was achieved largely because of the huge amount of potato acreage in the state’s second district.

Idaho is the nation’s top potato-producing state.

The 2nd district ranked No. 3 and the 1st district ranked No. 9

in sugar beet acres, though NASS did not provide acreage numbers for those districts to protect producers’ privacy.

With 1.06 million acres, the second district ranked No. 7 nationally in 2022 in land used for all hay production.

It ranked No. 10 in total value of cattle and calves, at \$1.6 billion in 2022, and was also No. 10 in total sales of livestock and poultry, at \$4.9 billion.

With \$62.3 million in sales, the 2nd Congressional District ranked No. 9 in the nation in the aquaculture category.

The district ranked No. 11 in the nation in wheat acreage, with 708,000 acres in 2022.

With \$158 million in total sales, the 2nd district ranked No 14 nationally in sales of organically produced commodities.

The average size of a farm in the 2nd district was 631 acres in 2022, larger than the statewide average of 505 acres.

The state’s 1st Congressional District also swings a big stick when it comes to agriculture.

There were \$2.4 billion worth of ag commodities sold in Idaho’s 1st Congressional District in 2022, ranking it No. 65 in the nation in that category.

The district includes the norther portion of the state and a good chunk of the southern part as well. It includes Meridian and Eagle and part of Boise.

Agriculture plays a major role in that district also, as Rep. Russ Fulcher, who represents it, knows very well, said Marisa Melton, the congressman’s communications director.

Fulcher is a fourth-generation dairy farmer.

“Agriculture is huge for him,” Melton said.

NASS data shows there were 11,052 farms in that district in 2022 and 4 million acres of land in farming.

The 1st district ranked No. 9 nationally in the “other crops and hay” category, No. 24 in milk sales, and No. 26 in a category that includes sheep and goats.

“As a fourth-generation Idahoan who grew up on a dairy farm, I am incredibly thankful for all the hard-working farmers, ranchers and producers who feed and fuel our nation,” Fulcher told IFBF. ■



RIGHT: A corn field is harvested in Idaho’s 1st Congressional District. There were \$2.4 billion worth of ag commodities sold in the district in 2022. Photo by Sean Ellis

FFA ‘tractor’ raffle keeps growing

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

BOISE – An annual “tractor” raffle has become a visual symbol of the Idaho FFA program, as well as an important fundraising tool.

In its 14th year, the raffle continues to raise scholarship money for FFA members and for the 100 FFA chapters across Idaho.

Six thousand tickets were sold and \$120,000 was raised this year. Half the money will go toward scholarships while half will go back to individual FFA chapters.

Idaho State Department of Agriculture Director Chanel Tewalt drew the winning tickets for this year’s raffle on July 9 in Boise.

Tewalt and other witnesses to this year’s raffle drawing spoke about the FFA program and how it helps students and the state of Idaho.

There are currently more than 6,000 FFA members in Idaho.

“FFA is such a huge part of every Idaho community; whether you’re an employer, community member or aggie, we all benefit from the incredible students that go through FFA,” Tewalt said. “It is an incredible program. There are not enough superlatives to describe Idaho FFA.”

Tewalt said FFA members “grow and develop into leaders, innovators, and collaborators, and make big differences in Idaho and global agriculture.”

She said that engaging with FFA students is one of the best parts of her job.

“It is not a trite statement to say that these students are the next generation of Idaho agriculture,” she said. “They make incredible employees. They’re leaders and innovators.”



Photos by Sean Ellis

Idaho State Department of Agriculture Director Chanel Tewalt draws winning tickets from this year’s FFA raffle, July 9 in Boise. Watching her draw the tickets are Kevin Barker, center, and Sid Freeman.

The winner of this year’s grand prize – a 2023 Can-Am Maverick Trail 700 utility vehicle – was Doug Lammler and the winning ticket was sold by the Nampa FFA Chapter.

Kevin Barker, an ag education teacher and FFA advisor from Notus, said it’s important to support FFA because of the opportunities it provides students, who are the future of the ag industry, as well as society in general.

“You can take any kind of a kid, from anywhere, and put them in the FFA and ag ed program, and it will enlighten them to all the different types of career opportunities available to them, whether it’s production agriculture, or the technical side of the industry,” he said. “It really teaches responsibility. It teaches them that they can be successful in pretty much any career they choose.”

Caldwell farmer Sid Freeman and his wife, Pam, started the raffle as a way to support a program they believe strongly in.

With the help of ag-related businesses, the Freemans in 2010 refurbished a 1941

Farmall tractor and hauled it around the state on a borrowed trailer to promote it. It was raffled off in April 2011.

The raffle has simple beginnings: the Freemans saw it as a way to get rid of an old tractor.

But it has grown into the Idaho FFA Foundation’s main scholarship fundraising effort and it has become a visual symbol of the Idaho FFA program.

It has also helped boost awareness of agricultural education.

“I knew how big I would like to see the raffle become; we’ve reached that,” Sid Freeman said. “This thing has just become phenomenal.”

He said Congress established the FFA for a reason.

“It’s not just important to our society, but the fact that these students are far more likely to graduate from high school, go on to a post-secondary education of some kind and complete that, and then come back to our communities as leaders in the future, you can’t put a price on that,” Freeman said.

After the first raffle in 2011, other farms and agribusinesses donated tractors in subsequent years and in 2020, the raffle program started offering off-road utility vehicles as the grand prize to attract a wider potential audience of ticket buyers.

Businesses have supported the raffle in a big way.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been donated to or raised for the tractor raffle program over the years from businesses across Idaho in the form of banner sponsorships as well as in-kind contributions and ticket sales.

In 2020, FFA officials raised ticket prices from \$10 to \$20 and began directing half of the money back to individual FFA chapters.

“It’s evolved over the years and is still making a huge impact in the Idaho FFA Foundation and everything that we do,” said Executive Director Carly Weaver.

The following were runner-up winners in this year’s raffle drawing:

- Nicole Lott was the winner of a Traeger grill donated by Campbell Tractor Company. That ticket was

sold by the Jerome FFA Chapter.

- Cedro Toro was the winner of a \$500 D&B Supply gift card donated by D&B Supply. The ticket was sold by the Middleton FFA Chapter.

- Matt Hodges won a cooler/BBQ bundle donated by Valley Wide Cooperative. The ticket was sold by the South Fremont FFA Chapter. ■



The grand prize in this year’s FFA raffle was a 2023 Can-Am Maverick Trail.

Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins





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Idaho Farm Bureau to donate \$250,000 toward new U of I meat science lab

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

MOSCOW, Idaho – Idaho Farm Bureau Federation will donate \$250,000 toward University of Idaho's new \$14 million meat science facility.

The new 12,750-square-foot facility on U of I's Moscow campus will be four times the size of the current meat science facility, which houses the university's meat science program and was built in the 1960s.

Groundbreaking on the project began last fall and it is expected to be completed in fall 2025.

The IFBF board of directors voted to support the project with a \$250,000 donation. IFBF is the state's largest general farming organization and represents more than 10,000 people in Idaho who are involved in agriculture.

IFBF President Bryan Searle, who farms in the Shelley area, said the organization appreciates the university's vision to update the facility into what will be a major asset to the state's cattle industry into the future.

"It's a privilege for us to be by their side to see this project through because we believe it will be a big part of the industry's success," he said. "We applaud all that the university is doing on behalf of agriculture."

There are currently more cows – about 2.5 million – than people in Idaho.

Cattle and calves is Idaho's No. 2 agricultural industry in terms of total farm-gate revenue and cattle producers in the state brought in an estimated \$2.3 billion in revenue in 2022.

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

The new facility, like the existing one, will be USDA-inspected and will be a modern meat processing facility designed to allow teaching, research, outreach, service and production to occur simultaneously.

Livestock producers in the region can have their animals processed there under USDA inspection, allowing them to direct-market their products, and employees from all segments of the meat supply chain will train there.

"We're thrilled by this generous gift from the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation, and we recognize we're positioned to be operating in our new, state-of-the-art abattoir by the fall of 2025 thanks to the generosity of numerous stakeholders," said Michael Parrella, dean of U of I's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, which oversees the university's meat science program. "New meat processing plants requiring trained staff at many levels have been opening throughout the state, and the new Meat Science and



Idaho Farm Bureau Federation photo

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation leaders present a \$250,000 check to University of Idaho officials May 23 to be used to help fund the university's new 12,750-square-foot meat science facility. From left to right: Michael Parrella, dean of U of I's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, Phil Bass, U of I meat science professor, IFBF President Bryan Searle, IFBF CEO Zak Miller, and James Nasados, U of I meat science lab manager.

Innovation Center Honoring Ron Richard will enable our college to expand upon teaching programs, research, public outreach and workforce development to meet industry needs."

The new facility will benefit the state's cattle producers and help the industry be more efficient and innovative into the future, said IFBF CEO Zak Miller.

"One of the things our Farm Bureau leaders are always looking for is, how can we support our community and help our producers be more successful," he said. "Supporting this facility is a natural way to support the university while at the same time support our cattle producers."

Miller toured the current facility recently with other Farm Bureau leaders and said he was very impressed with the ingenuity of the people who work in the university's meat science program.

With the new facility and modern technology, he said, "I really think they'll find innovative and revolutionary ways for Idaho cattle producers to better utilize these animals we have stewardship over." ■

Record U.S. agricultural trade deficit forecasted to keep growing

By **Betty Resnick**
AFBF Economist

After decades of substantial U.S. agricultural trade surpluses, staggering agricultural trade deficits over the past two years have caught the nation's attention.

For fiscal year 2024 (October 2023 – September 2024), USDA's Economic Research Service estimates that there will be a record \$32 billion agricultural trade deficit.

The fiscal year 2024 deficit follows the current record deficit of \$16.7 billion set in fiscal year 2023 and would be only the fourth agricultural trade deficit in the last 50 years.

This trend reversal leaves many people scratching their heads, but the American Farm Bureau Federation economics team is here to help explain how we got here.

Background on agricultural trade mix

Agricultural trade is essential to our nation's food security, and benefits both farmers and consumers alike. Farmers find export markets eager to buy U.S. products that we grow in abundance such as grains, oilseeds, meat and more.

Consumers have become used to eating fresh fruits and vege-

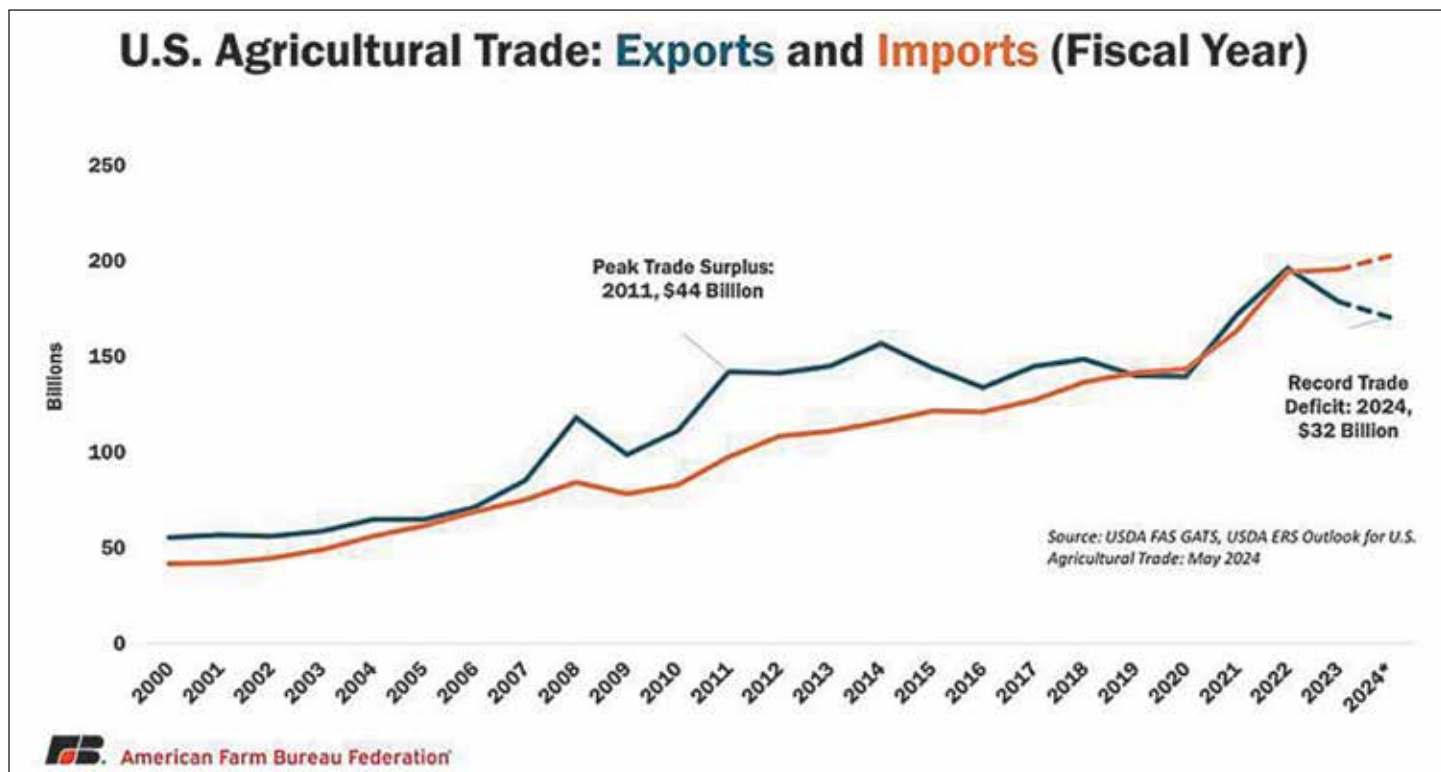
tables year-round, much of which would be impossible without imports from our southern trading partners.

Many cannot live without their daily cup of coffee, a tropical import we do not grow in the continental United States. (Apologies to Hawaii and Puerto Rico, which combined grow approximately 0.2% of the coffee we consume.)

Some of our seasonal fruit and vegetable producers have been squeezed by imports from our southern neighbors, but much of what we import does not directly compete with domestic agricultural products, and some of those imports are value-added products produced with raw agricultural products exported from the U.S.

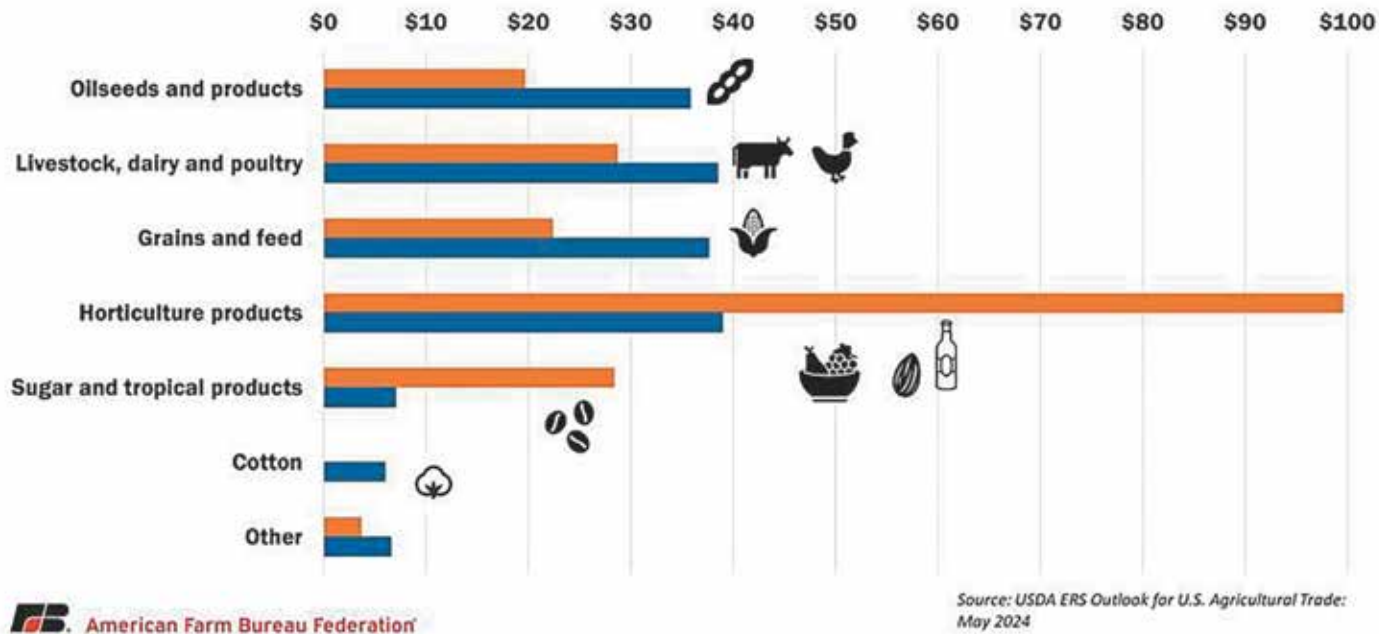
In fact, 16% of total forecasted fiscal year 2024 imports consist of coffee, cocoa, distilled spirits and beer. Other imports complement U.S. domestic production.

For example, much of the beef imported to the U.S. are lean cuts that are blended with fattier, U.S.-raised beef for desired levels of leanness in ground beef. Without imports of lean beef, U.S. ranchers who focus on growing the highest quality beef in the world for premium cuts for delicious steaks would miss out on the market demand for ground beef.



U.S. Agricultural Trade: Exports and Imports

Fiscal Year 2024 Forecast



Rising imports and the challenges to U.S. specialty crops

The category with the largest trade deficit is horticultural products – predominantly made up of specialty crops including fresh fruits and vegetables. Accounting for 49% of all imports by value, it has increased by \$22 billion (+31%) since fiscal year 2020.

In part, the increase in horticultural products reflects a thriving U.S. economy. As real income per capita increases, consumers are demanding more fresh fruits and vegetables. This also reflects the strong U.S. dollar and a focus on healthy diets.

However, rising imports are both a cause and effect of the reduction in U.S. fresh fruit and vegetable production, which has declined in volume by 10% and 23.1%, respectively, since 2000.

U.S. fresh fruit and vegetable production is declining due to a multitude of factors, including land loss due to urban encroachment, diseases such as citrus greening, and, probably most importantly, a lack of affordable and available farm labor.

Production of many fresh fruits and vegetables is extremely labor intensive.

For U.S. agricultural production broadly, labor accounts for about 10% of expenses. For fruit and vegetable production, labor costs account for 38.5% and 28.8% of input costs, respectively.

Seasonal agricultural producers have access to the H-2A temporary worker visa program, a generally reliable but pricy option to bring in workers from other countries. Farmers are increasingly using the H-2A visa program, under which 378,000 jobs were certified in fiscal year 2023 – three times the number certified only 10 years ago.

With the H-2A visa program, producers must pay an hourly rate set by the government called the “Adverse Effect Wage Rate,” which is established regionally based on local rates for field and

livestock workers.

The AEW has risen precipitously in recent years, climbing an average of 5.9% annually since 2019. In 2024, the national AEW average is \$17.55 per hour. In California, the largest fresh fruit- and vegetable-producing state, the AEW is \$19.75.

In addition to the required AEW, employers provide housing, food, transportation, visa fees, insurance and other expenses for every worker.

At the same time, agricultural workers in Mexico are estimated to make almost the same amount in an entire day than for one hour of work in California paid at the AEW rate.

While high labor costs are raising the cost of producing specialty crops domestically, increasing imports during the growing season are lowering prices and potential revenue for U.S. producers.

Increasing costs and decreasing revenues make for an unprofitable business, and a further reduction in U.S. fruit and vegetable production.

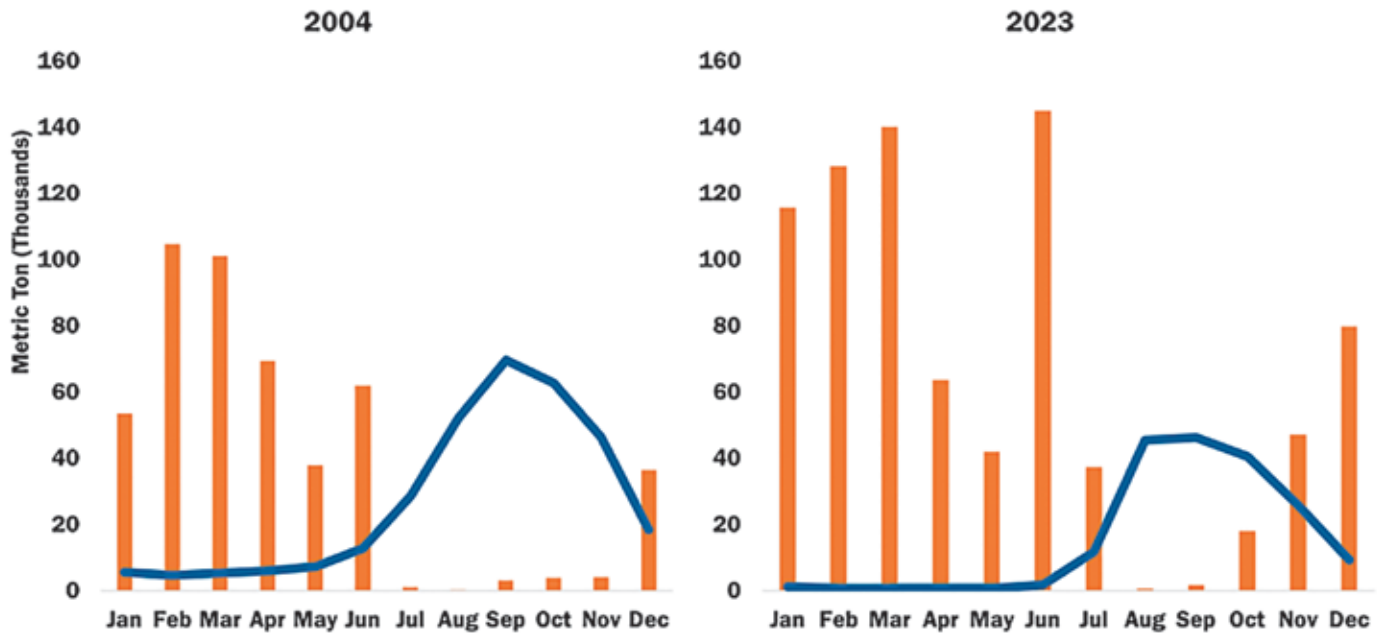
This is especially prevalent in the months just before and just after peak domestic production, when producers often made their highest profit margins.

This phenomenon is demonstrated in the U.S. table grape industry, i.e., the grapes you eat. Over 99% of all U.S. table grapes are grown in California and they are available in stores from May to January.

While in 2004 only 2% of all table grape imports occurred between July and November, in 2023 the share had grown to 13%. For the months of July, October, and November, imports have grown an overwhelming 1,126%!

Between marketing years 2018/19 and 2022/23, U.S. table grape production declined by 19%.

U.S. Table Grapes: Monthly Exports and Imports



AFB American Farm Bureau Federation

Source: U.S. Census Bureau via USDA FAS GATS Database

Decreasing U.S. exports

Two major factors have contributed to the decline of the value of U.S. exports since 2021: falling commodity prices and the strong U.S. dollar.

As corn and soy prices fell, the export value naturally decreased.

The strong U.S. dollar is making U.S. products less competitive on currency exchange alone.

For instance, Japan is consistently a top-5 market for U.S. agricultural products. The Japanese yen is the lowest it has been against the U.S. dollar since 1990 and half of its value from only 12 years ago, in 2012.

While this exchange rate is great for

U.S. tourists visiting Japan, it is very difficult for Japanese consumers seeking to purchase quality U.S. products.

Worryingly, U.S. corn and soybean export quantity has not picked up in conjunction with declining commodity prices, which fell by 30% and 12% respectively between fiscal years 2023 and 2024.

U.S. grain and oilseed exports are seeing headwinds from rising competition from Brazil. Efforts by China to become less dependent on agricultural imports from the U.S. are also having an impact.

In fact, fiscal year 2024 is forecasted to be the first year that Mexico is the top destination for U.S. agricultural exports.

There is also a growing trade deficit in animal fats and vegetable oils spurred by rapid market- and policy-driven growth demand for feedstocks for renewable diesel production.

The Market Access and Foreign Market Development (MAP and FMD) programs are one way that USDA supports agricultur-

al exports by providing matching funds to industry groups that promote U.S. agricultural products abroad.

MAP and FMD funding have not been increased since 2006 and 2002, respectively. Using Commodity Credit Corporation dollars, USDA in 2023 introduced \$1.2 billion in Regional Agricultural Promotion Program (RAPP) spending that works similarly to the MAP/FMD programs, but limits spending to markets outside of the top U.S. agricultural export destinations (i.e., that excludes China, Mexico, Canada and the European Union).

Both the farm bill passed through the House Committee on Agriculture and the farm bill proposal from Senate Agriculture Committee Ranking Member Sen. John Boozman, R-Ark., seek to double MAP/FMD funding.

Conclusion

Fiscal year 2019 was the first U.S. agricultural trade deficit going back to at least 1967. We have subsequently faced an agricultural trade deficit in four of six years, with a record \$32 billion deficit forecasted in fiscal year 2024.

In aggregate, we import and export complementary products, so that a trade deficit in agricultural products is not inherently a problem. However, the expanding trade deficit reflects some serious challenges imposed on U.S. agriculture, including lower commodity prices, stress in domestic specialty crop production, and less competitive access to many traditional U.S. export markets, among other factors.

Policy changes to stem rapidly increasing farm labor costs, increase exports by negotiating lower tariffs and better market access, and more international market promotion funding could help return the U.S. to agricultural trade surpluses. ■

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Shay's, could
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**Farm Bureau
INSURANCE**



*You're automatically entered into our \$500 drawing when you refer a friend, even if they don't purchase a policy. Scan the QR code for complete rules and restrictions. Above left: Shay from Kimberly, Idaho, the winner of our 2nd quarter 2024 Refer A Friend, Get A Gift \$500 drawing, with his agent Cindy Packard.

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Photos by John O'Connell

Phil Bass, a University of Idaho associate professor of meat science, demonstrates how to properly carve a pig carcass into primal cuts on May 7 during a demonstration for a beginning animal science class at Madison High School in Rexburg.

U of I expert teaches meat cutting at Rexburg high school

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

REXBURG – Madison High School sophomore Tayton Price didn't hesitate to pick up a bone saw and start carving large pieces from the pig carcass at his group's table, mimicking a demonstration University of Idaho meat scientist Phil Bass gave at the start of class.

Throughout the remainder of the 70-minute period, four groups of beginning animal science students took turns dividing their pig carcass into primal cuts, which are large sections of meat that are the first to be separated during butchering, including the shoulder, leg, loin and side.

Bass made the trip from Moscow to guest teach at the Rexburg high school on May 7, introducing youth to meat science as an

“I think the industry is starving for good meat cutters, and I think when you get somebody like Phil Bass here, who is an expert in that industry, I think maybe he opens some doors for those kids.”

–Patrick Dixon, MHS agriculture teacher

often overlooked but rewarding career that pays well and desperately needs labor.

Bass hopes it will be the first of many meat-cutting demonstrations and lessons he'll host in Idaho high schools in the coming years.

For Price, the class was a highlight of the school year and an eye-opening experience. Price said he can envision himself working as a meat cutter. At the minimum, he's an avid hunter, and the skills should pay off when he next harvests a deer.

“You actually get to see the specific cuts and the primals,” said Price, who worked with a surgeon's confidence and precision. “I had done this with my grandpa one time when I was younger. I think I know a lot of the basics, but it's definitely good to learn more.”

During the activity, students impressed Bass by correctly identifying several bones and muscle groups. Many of them echoed vocabular terms Bass used in his demonstration as they surveyed the spareribs, roasts, bacon and sausage meat they'd carved.

The class continue the lesson later with their agriculture teacher, Patrick Dixon, further breaking the meat down into sub-primal and retail cuts.

Dixon is a 2005 U of I agricultural education graduate who takes FFA members to annual meat science competitions run by Bass. Dixon also serves on the board of directors for the Steer-A-Year program

within U of I's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.

Dixon and Bass planned the cutting demonstration during a Steer-A-Year meeting last fall. Dixon believes the experience should make his students better consumers, able to prepare meat properly and spot the best buys. He's also receptive to any experience that raises their awareness of career options.

“I think the industry is starving for good meat cutters, and I think when you get somebody like Phil Bass here, who is an expert in that industry, I think maybe he opens some doors for those kids,” Dixon said. “If they are interested in doing this someday, he has connections or pathways

to help direct some of those kids into that field.”

To improve its facilities and meet increasing demand in the field, U of I has broken ground on a 12,750-square-foot abattoir that should open in the fall of 2025, to be called the Meat Science and Innovation Center Honoring Ron Richard.

Bass emphasized new meat plants have opened or are opening throughout Idaho, including two new beef plants in Idaho Falls, a new beef plant in Kuna, a new beef plant in Jerome and several other small operations that are growing and will need additional staff.

Out of high school, workers can earn at least \$20 per hour on the floor of a meat plant. U of I offers a four-year bachelor's degree in animal science that prepares graduates for higher-paying managerial jobs in meat processing.

“This is a new thing we're trying to do. We're trying to help folks realize there are career opportunities in meat processing, and most young kids don't even get an opportunity to see animals and carcasses,” Bass said. “This is a chance for them to get exposed to it. I hope this is just the beginning of something big.” ■



RIGHT: Phil Bass, a University of Idaho associate professor of meat science, wearing an apron, watches as Tayton Price, a sophomore at Madison High School in Rexburg, begins dividing a pig carcass into primal cuts.

SOUTHEAST IDAHO LANDOWNERS ARE NEEDED TO PARTICIPATE IN IDAHO FISH AND GAME'S MANAGED HUNT PROGRAM IN FALL OF 2024!



THIS UNIQUE PROGRAM FORMS PARTNERSHIPS AMONG WILLING LANDOWNERS, RESPONSIBLE HUNTERS, AND IDFG TO MANAGE HUNTING ACCESS ON PRIVATE LANDS.

Here's what landowners need to know about the Managed Hunt Program:

- Idaho Fish and Game serves as the primary contact for hunting requests. Landowners do not have to engage with, take phone calls from, or make arrangements with hunters.
- Landowners decide when/what/how hunters use the property and even which species can be hunted. This includes the number of hunters allowed to access the property, which is monitored and enforced by IDFG.
- Hunters who violate the rules of use for a property can be charged with trespass, which could result in a loss of hunting and fishing privileges.
- Landowners do not receive monetary compensation for participation, but receive in-kind compensation through Fish and Game management of hunter registrations and increased enforcement presence.

If you are a landowner who is interested in learning more about the Managed Hunt Program in southeast Idaho, please contact the Idaho Fish and Game office in Pocatello at 208-232-4703 or visit this link: idfg.idaho.gov/visit/managed



Crossword Puzzle

Fitness

Answer key on page 31

Across

5. Low to moderate intensity exercise

9. A short bar with fixed or changeable weights

11. Provides energy and insulation to the body

13. A low-force, long stretch of a desired muscle

15. High intensity exercise when muscle burn occurs

16. The storage form of glucose found in the liver and muscles

18. Provides the exerciser to train in a safe and effective manner

19. The number of calories per minute that a physical activity expends

21. Made up of amino acids, builds and repairs body tissues

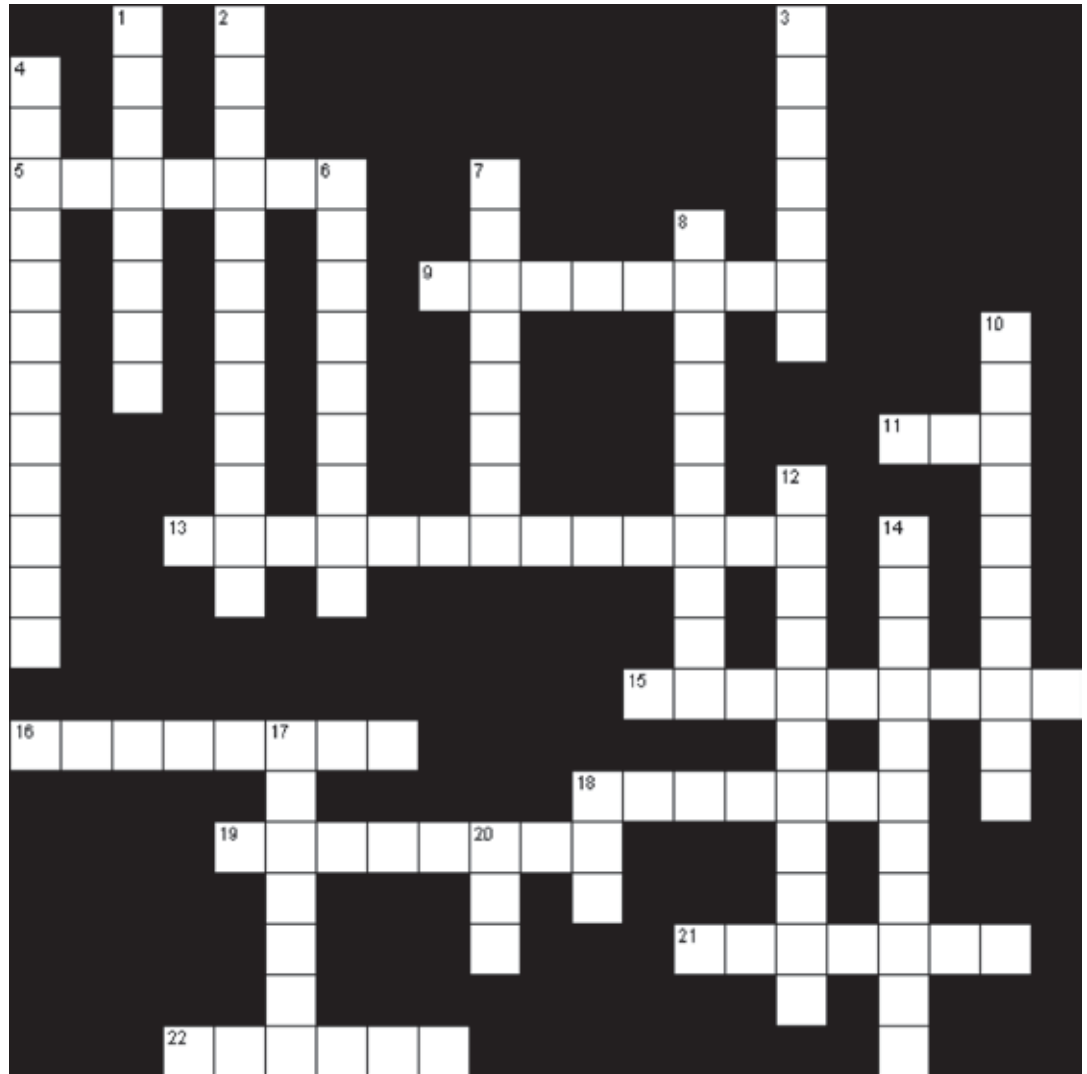
22. The potential to do work and activity

Down

1. A healthy activity

2. Nutrient that is the body's main source of energy

3. A straight or curved bar with weights



4. Bodyweight without body fat

6. Fat beneath the skin

7. An exercise performed by curling the midsection

8. One full movement of a motion

10. Chemical and physiological processes in the body that provides energy

12. A fatty substance found in the body but essential for the production of hormones

14. Carries fat through the body

17. A simple sugar, the body's main source of energy

18. The completion of a total number of repetitions

20. The muscles in the front of the stomach

A message from the Idaho State Department of Agriculture **Biosecurity at Livestock Exhibitions**

One of the most exciting times of the year for youth in agriculture is here, fair season! While fairs and livestock shows are cherished traditions in our communities, the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) would like to remind fair management and livestock exhibitors of the risks associated with livestock exhibitions.

The potential for disease transmission greatly increases when groups of animals gather for shows. ISDA encourages fair management and exhibitors to implement appropriate biosecurity measures to help minimize the risk and spread of contagious disease at fairs and livestock shows.

Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), a serious disease that can infect cattle and poultry, is currently circulating throughout the U.S., including Idaho. The United States Department of Agriculture has identified the spread of HPAI between cows within the same herd, from cows to poultry, and from cows to humans. While HPAI causes less severe illness in cattle, this disease is deadly to domestic poultry. With the risk of HPAI to dairy cattle and poultry, ISDA would like to highlight the importance of biosecurity measures at events.

Deciding to take your livestock or poultry to an exhibition?

Before the event, contact your event coordinator to understand any biosecurity related event requirements. Become familiar with the signs of livestock illness and work with your veterinarian to ensure your animals are free of any illness.

While your livestock are at the event, consistently observe livestock for any signs of illness and follow the event's biosecurity plan. Avoid nose to nose contact between animals and do not share equipment with other exhibitors.

When returning home from the event, isolate and observe animals daily for illness before allowing contact with other resident animals.

ISDA staff and veterinarians are available to provide guidance on biosecurity when making the decision to bring livestock or poultry to events. Best of luck this fair season, Idaho!

Contact us for more information! (208) 332-8540

IDAHO STATE DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE



IDAHO FARMERS MARKET MONTH

Governor Little has proudly declared the second annual August as Idaho Farmers Market Month. To mark this special occasion, Idaho Preferred and the Idaho Farmers Market Association are coming together to celebrate the tremendous impact farmers markets have on Idaho's economy and our quality of life.

Farmers markets are a vital part of our local food supply chain, offering communities across the state easy access to fresh, locally-grown produce at the height of its season. These markets create a direct connection between residents and their local farmers, ranchers, and food artisans, giving everyone a chance to learn about the origins of their food. In essence, farmers markets are not just places to shop—they are essential hubs that enrich our lives and sustain our local economy.

IDAHO FARMERS MARKET FINDER

The Idaho Preferred website is your go-to resource for local Idaho agriculture products and experiences. Their Farmers Market Directory makes it easy to find nearby markets and vendors.



You can filter 55 + Idaho markets by region, days of the week, drive-thru options, mobile markets, and SNAP or Double Up Food Bucks participation. If you love supporting Idaho farmers, this tool helps you find a market close to you with ease!

VISIT: [HTTPS://IDAHOPREFERRED.COM/PRODUCTS/FARMERS-MARKETS/](https://idahopreferred.com/products/farmers-markets/)



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Grazing livestock in forestlands

A tool for sustainable management

By Audra Cochran
University of Idaho

Livestock grazing can be a practical and beneficial tool to promote sustainable forest management. By utilizing different types of livestock, forest owners can achieve vegetation control, enhance biodiversity, and promote soil health.

However, successful implementation requires understanding the roles of various animals and awareness of potential challenges.

Livestock browsing is an effective method for controlling underbrush and invasive species that can fuel wildfires. Removing a portion of the vegetation helps create natural firebreaks, open spaces, and reduces the volume of combustible materials (ladder fuels).

Strategically rotating livestock through a stand can enable forest owners to better manage understory vegetation growth.

Grazing helps maintain a variety of habitats,



Photos by Audra Cochran

Cattle grazing on forestlands can help reduce vegetative competition for seedlings.

itats, promoting plant and animal diversity. Selectively grazing and browsing can prevent dominant species from overtaking an area. This supports the regeneration of native plants and creates habitats for various wildlife species.

Soil health improvement

The movement and grazing patterns of livestock contribute to soil aeration and nutrient cycling. Animal manure adds organic matter to the soil, improving its structure and fertility. Livestock hooves also aid in scarification of sod and duff layers, supporting better water filtration, root growth, and seed-to-soil contact.

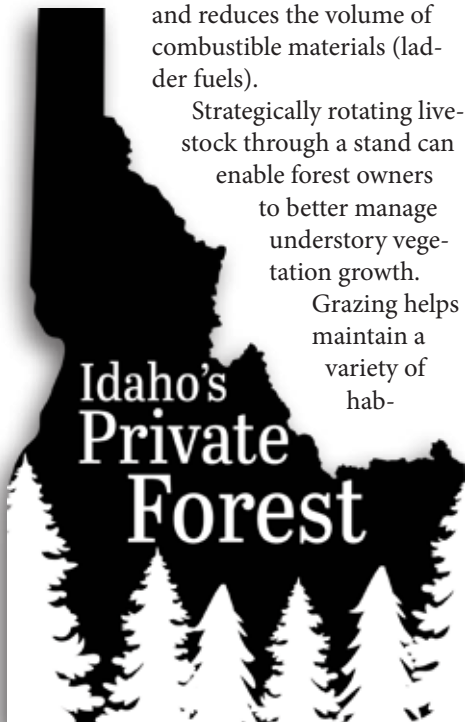
With proper management, livestock grazing and browsing promotes biodiversity in the understory vegetation that is established. This helps regulate soil temperature and pH, aids in moisture control, promotes stability, and helps in fire mitigation efforts.

Types of livestock best suited for forest grazing

Many livestock species can be utilized in forest grazing systems, but some species may be better suited to specific settings. It is important to understand the characteristics of each species to ensure the most

optimal pairing of livestock and setting can be achieved.

- **Goats:** agile and curious, goats browse on a wide range of vegetation, including shrubs and woody plants. Their preference for woody plants helps keep brush under control, reducing competition for resources among desired tree species and understory vegetation.
- **Sheep:** well-suited for maintaining grasslands and open spaces within forests, sheep grazing helps prevent the encroachment of woody vegetation and supports the growth of diverse herbaceous plants. Sheep prefer grasses and forbs, making them complementary to goats in a mixed-grazing system.
- **Cattle:** cattle contribute to forest management by grazing on grasses and forbs. They are less selective grazers than goats or sheep, enabling them to be used in a broader range of settings. Their larger size and weight also contribute to soil aeration as they move, aiding in the decomposition of organic matter, nutrient cycling, and seed-to-soil contact.
- **Bison:** although not as commonly used, bison are native grazers and can play a unique role in forest ecosystems. Their grazing patterns promote the regener-



ation of native grasslands and improve habitat conditions for various species, making them valuable for restoration efforts. Bison are well-adapted to a wide range of climatic conditions and can thrive in forested areas.

Considerations for landowners – Monitoring

While livestock provide numerous benefits to the forest landscape, it is important to actively monitor their grazing patterns. Overstocking livestock on a parcel can lead to overgrazing and negatively impact your forest grazing system.

Dispersing animals evenly across the parcel increases the efficacy of vegetation usage and reduces livestock congregation, maintaining plant health and viability.

Congregation can lead to soil compaction concerns, streambank degradation, nutrient runoff, and vegetation browsing and/or trampling (including seedlings in a new plantation).

Effective strategies to manage animal dispersion include:

- Strategically distributing water sources, salt, and supplements across the parcel to encourage distribution.
- Using herding or fencing to promote movement.
- Implementing vegetative management practices, such as rotational grazing.

Invasive species control

While livestock can help manage invasive species, they can also inadvertently spread them. Forest owners should regularly monitor for invasive plants and implement control measures as needed.

This might involve manual removal, targeted grazing, or the use of herbicides in conjunction with grazing. By remaining proactive, landowners can minimize the spread of invasive species.

Wildlife conflicts

Grazing livestock in forestlands can also lead to conflicts with wildlife, particularly predators. Using guardian animals, securing livestock at night, or installing predator-proof fencing can help minimize these potential conflicts.

These management techniques can help the forest owner maintain a balance between livestock production and wildlife



TOP: Guardian animals and security fencing can help minimize livestock-wildlife conflicts. ABOVE: Learning how to effectively monitor your available forage and grazing practices can help increase your forage utilization. UI Extension offers classes to help landowners learn how more about grazing and range monitoring. Contact your local office for more information.

conservation. Collaboration with wildlife agencies can also provide additional resources and support for managing livestock-wildlife conflicts effectively.

Conclusion

Using livestock for forest management offers numerous benefits to forest owners. With thoughtful planning and adap-

tive management, livestock grazing can become a valuable component of forest stewardship, contributing to the long-term health and resilience of forest ecosystems. ■

Audra Cochran is a University of Idaho Extension educator in Lewis County. She can be reached at audrac@uidaho.edu.

Florage Farms supplies flowers for luxury destination wedding market

By **Dianna Troyer**
For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

FFA students in eastern Idaho get work experience from an expert who raises wholesale fresh cut flowers for wedding planners in nearby resort towns of Sun Valley and Jackson.

The planners rely on Florage Farms north of Blackfoot for their festive events.

“We supply a niche luxury market because we have unusual and hardy flowers known for their long-lasting blooms,” said Lorin Harrison, co-owner with his partner Vanessa Kuemmerle of Florage Farms.

“Flowers are an emotional purchase, so clients rarely negotiate about prices when planning destination weddings,” he said. “In a niche market like this, networking happens fast, so planners hear about us.”

Wedding planners hire floral designers who seek unusual varieties of flowers and ornamental foliage to create visually stunning settings.

“We even grow a chocolate Cosmos that smells like chocolate,” Harrison said.

Within earshot of Interstate 15 at the Rose/Firth exit, the farm’s location is ideal. The two resort towns are a two- to three-hour drive away.

“It makes it easy for clients to pick up their orders or for us to deliver,” Harrison said.

The wedding season coincides with their growing season from spring to fall. Harrison and his staff of nine employees, plus summer seasonal workers, grow more than 100 different varieties of flowers in fields and three greenhouses on nearly 12 acres.

LEFT TOP: Lorin Harrison grows more than 100 varieties of fresh cut flowers at Florage Farms near Blackfoot. Photo by Dianna Troyer

LEFT: Butterfly Ranunculus are popular with the petals opening and closing during the day like butterfly wings. Photo courtesy of Florage Farms





ABOVE: Florage Farms specializes in providing flowers to floral designers for destination weddings in Jackson and Sun Valley. LEFT: Pon Pon Igloo Ranunculus are prized for their unusual green and white petals. Photos by Dianna Troyer

“We start before Easter with tulips and daffodils,” he said. “There are so many varieties of tulips in all colors and petals, some that are double or others with fringe. The Angelique tulip looks like a peony.”

After the tulips are harvested, the bulbs are dug up by hand and will be replanted for the next season.

Some of the farm’s most popular flowers are varieties of Tulips, Filipendula, Ranunculus, Dahlia, Veronica, Bells of Ireland, Snapdragons, and Sweet Peas.

“People like Ranunculus because the petals open and close during the day, like butterfly wings,” he said.

Despite a short growing season, intense sun, and a high soil pH of 8.2, some flowers grow well in eastern Idaho, he said of Scabiosa, Delphinium, Anemone, Lisianthus, and Icelandic Poppies.

To keep updated about new flower varieties, Harrison and Kuemmerle travel to Italy and the Netherlands to see what flower researchers are developing.

In April during a tour in the Netherlands that was organized for growers, they saw new varieties of flowers that will be on the market in five to seven years.

“A few of the Ranunculus varieties will be a light lavender, pink blushes, and whites,” he said. “It can take more than a decade to

hybridize, trial, and release a new variety – a painstaking and very expensive process.”

Before growing fresh cut flowers in Idaho, Harrison managed an orchard in Utah, where he also raised and sold vegetables and grew flowers for his bee hives. He marketed some flowers through the Pickling Collective, a co-op of local flower farmers.

Wanting to expand his floral products in 2019, Harrison networked with other growers and learned of eastern Idaho flower farmers Ralph Thurston and his wife, Jeriann Sabin, owners of Bindweed Farm.

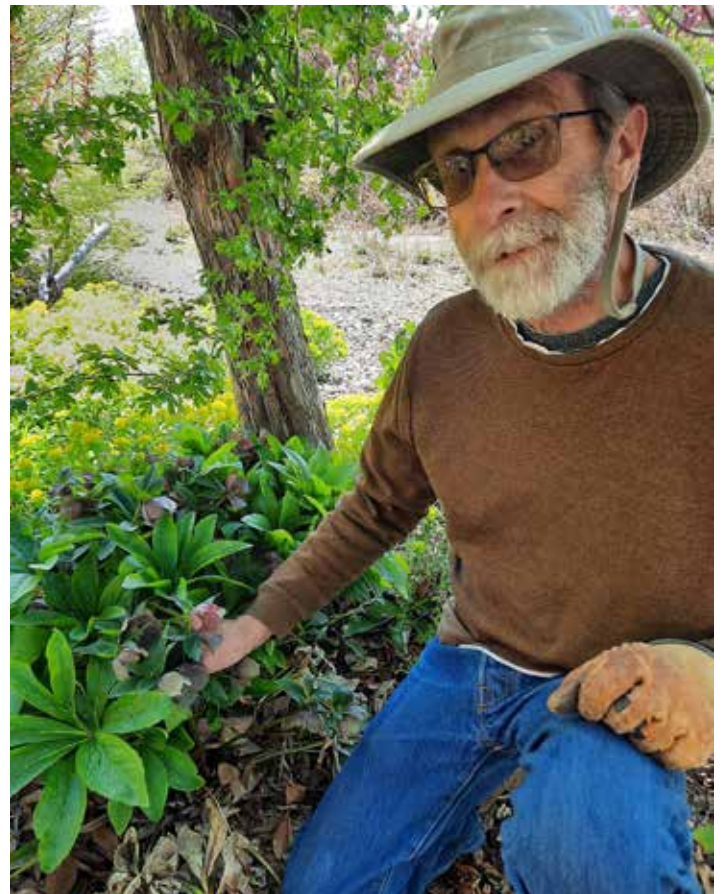
They were known in the industry for offering advice to fresh cut flower farmers through their two books: “Deadhead: The Bindweed Way to Grow Flowers,” and “All Pollen, No Petal: Behind the Flower Farm Dream.”

They had established Bindweed in 1991 and began supplying the Sun Valley and Jackson markets after a fresh cut flower grower in Arco, who had those accounts, retired.

“When I came up to buy plants, Ralph said they were ready to retire after 28 years and wanted to sell the business, so I bought it,” Harrison said.

He renamed it Florage Farms and sold his Utah business.

“Depending on the first frost, we shut down by October or November,” Harrison said. “Raising vegetables and flowers has always been a hobby. It’s fun to have a small farm, and this one with so many different crops to manage keeps us engaged.” ■



LEFT: Foxtail lily or Eremerus blooms in mid-June and thrives with almost no irrigation. Photo courtesy of Bindweed Farm

RIGHT: Ralph Thurston, who grew up on a dairy farm in eastern Idaho, has written books about raising fresh cut flowers and eastern Idaho's complex and often conflicted agricultural history. Photo by Dianna Troyer

Author Ralph Thurston shares advice about successful flower farming and eastern Idaho's complex agricultural history

By Dianna Troyer

For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

A devotion to agriculture, along with innate curiosity, flourishes in farmer and author Ralph Thurston, who lives in eastern Idaho.

Those traits compelled him to become a successful fresh cut flower farmer, writer, and agricultural historian.

He has written a wide range of books about diverse subjects, including advice about flower farming and eastern Idaho's complex and often conflicted farm and ranch history.

Growing up on a dairy farm near Pingree, Thurston said he has "always been the type of person to ask questions and experiment – whatever I did. I enjoyed raising everything from crops to bees to flowers, then during winter I'd do research and write books. With both farming and writing, an answer to a question leads to another question and answer and another question and topic."

Thurston became a successful fresh cut flower farmer unintentionally after growing flowers for his beehives. Eventually, selling flowers to friends and neighbors turned into a business.

From 1991 until 2019, he and his wife, Jeriann Sabin, operated Bindweed Farm, a wholesale fresh cut flower farm near Rose north of Blackfoot. They chose Bindweed for their farm's name because the plant's strong twining vines thrive in all kinds of growing conditions.

"We went from experimenting on a shoestring budget to a six-figure income," he said. "It was a lot of long hours and trialing more than 300 species of flowers until we found the 90 to grow that were best suited to our climate, soil, and market."

Not wanting others to make the mistakes they did, they wrote two books – "Deadhead: The Bindweed Way to Grow Flowers," and "All Pollen, No Petal: Behind the Flower Farm Dream."

"We've learned a lot from our experiments and hope to inspire

you to make some of your own, so you can be deadheading home from your sales route with an empty truck, full of satisfaction,” they wrote.

With their successful growing techniques established, they supplied florists in Idaho and Utah as well as the niche luxury market of wedding planners in Sun Valley and Jackson.

“A grower in Arco who had been supplying those resort towns retired, so we stepped in to provide what they needed,” Thurston said.

After retiring and selling Bindweed Farm in 2019, they have continued sharing their expertise on Instagram @deadhead-cutflowers with nearly 2,000 followers.

Although no longer in business, their love of flowers has never waned. They work about three hours a week with their xeriscape flowers on two acres.

In mid-June, they anticipate their spectacular blooms of Eremurus or foxtail lily.

“It thrives with almost no irrigation – we have a row we haven’t watered in 10 years. Once it’s settled in some moist soil, you may never need to irrigate again,” he advised on Instagram. “It doesn’t like wet feet, so add sand or pea gravel to an area and never think about it again. Plant it in the fall.”

Bingham pioneers’ struggles and successes

After the growing seasons ended, Thurston’s curiosity has led him to research and write about agricultural history.

“Growing up, I remember there was a barbed wire fence near our farm, and I wondered who put it there,” he said. “That led me to learn about our county’s pioneering families and their struggles and conflicts. There’s always something to write about.”

He publishes his Bingham County ag history books on Amazon and also sells them at the Idaho Potato Museum in Blackfoot.

In May, he released “We, the Peoples: Two Canals’ War for Territory.” He describes the long legal battle waged between the Peoples Canal—a Mormon Church

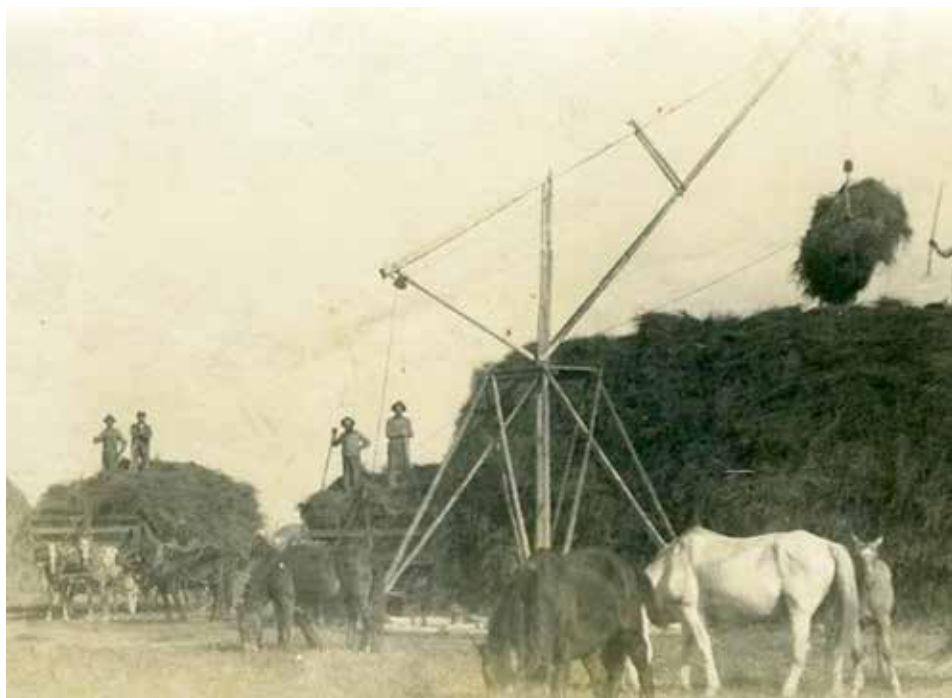


Photo courtesy of Ralph Thurston

John Haugh and his helpers stack hay around 1915.

“Whatever I write, I portray diverse pioneers and show how they made eastern Idaho into what it is today. All these little eruptions of history help represent our region’s complex character.”

–Ralph Thurston

backed irrigation system—and the American Falls Canal—the Gentile counterpart.

He explores the financial dealings and social interactions behind their battle over rights to irrigate 70,000 acres of eastern Idaho farm ground.

In April, he published “The Great Pasture: Bingham County’s Shifting Dreams.” It chronicles the movements of Mormons, farmers, Mexicans and Native Americans through eastern Idaho, covering an

era that spans from the Oregon Trail’s inception to the 1960s – a time when gasoline engines replaced horsepower, and sprinkler systems erased dry farming and furrow irrigation.

“These movements in Bingham County bring the trends of an entire nation to light,” he said.

Last year’s book was “The Shanghi Plain: Bingham County’s Early History.”

“It’s a 100-year-tour through southeastern Idaho, focusing on canal systems that transformed the desert to farm fields with stops at small towns and homesteads to elaborate on the events and people who were impacted,” he said.

In “Tilden,” a work of historical fiction, he tells of how the Carey Act and world affairs transformed southeast Idaho. He interweaves the lives of Mormons, Native Americans, the last of the rangeland herders and immigrants from Japan, Italy, Mexico, Russia, and Germany.

“Whatever I write, I portray diverse pioneers and show how they made eastern Idaho into what it is today,” he said. “All these little eruptions of history help represent our region’s complex character.” ■



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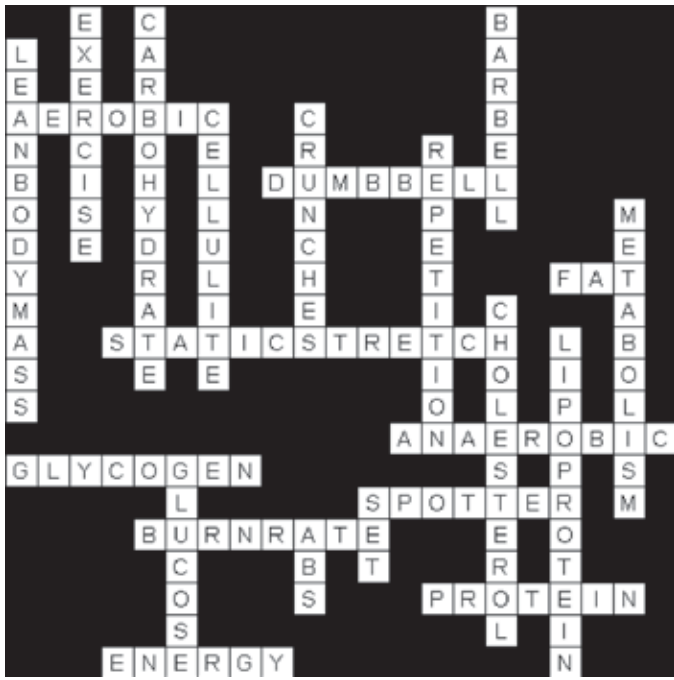
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Answer key for page 21 Crossword Puzzle



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Submitted photo

A wheat field near Ririe is shown in this Idaho Wheat Commission photo. The total value of Idaho farm product exports rose 10 percent during the first quarter.

Idaho ag export value continues on record pace

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

The total value of Idaho agricultural exports rose 10 percent during the first quarter of the year, while U.S. export value declined 4 percent.

“Idaho’s agricultural exports were very strong against a backdrop of weaker commodity prices and a relatively strong U.S. dollar,” said Doug Robison, the Idaho president for AgWest Farm Credit.

“Idaho’s export growth was led by potatoes and livestock, offsetting weakness in dairy products,” he added.

Idaho has set records for total ag export value for three straight years, and through the first three months of this year, the state is on track to set another one.

Idaho companies sold \$359 million worth of agricultural products in other countries during the first quarter of 2024, according to U.S. Census Bureau data released in early May. That’s 10 percent more than the same three-month period in 2023.

A record \$1.18 billion worth of Idaho agricultural products were exported to other countries in 2023. That represented three straight years of record export value from Idaho, according to the Census Bureau data.

That data shows Idaho is on a different trajectory than the U.S. as a whole when it comes to ag export value. That’s good news considering about half of all ag commodities produced in Idaho are exported to

other countries.

The Census Bureau numbers show that total U.S. ag export value of \$191 billion in 2023 was down 10 percent from the record total recorded in 2022.

A separate set of data released annually by USDA in the fall shows Idaho set ag export value records in 2020, 2021 and 2022. The USDA data for 2023 will be released in early November.

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

The USDA data, which shows Idaho sold \$2.89 billion worth of ag products in 2022, captures more of the state’s farm exports but is not as timely as the Census Bureau data, which is released monthly.

However, both sets of data track closely when it comes to percentage increases and decreases.

The recent Census Bureau data shows that Canada remained the top destination for Idaho ag exports, as \$115 million worth of Idaho ag products were sold in that country from January through March. That represents a 17 percent increase compared to the same period in 2023.

A total of \$75 million worth of Idaho ag products were sold in Mexico during the first quarter, a 22 percent increase, and \$27 million worth of Idaho ag products were sold in China, a 6 percent increase.

Japan (\$22.3 million, 49 percent increase) and the Netherlands (\$22 million, 18 percent increase) were the No. 4 and 5 markets for Idaho ag products in the first quarter, followed by South Korea (\$18 million, 34 percent decrease).

A total of \$62 million worth of Idaho ag products in the “dairy products” category were exported during the first quarter, a 25 percent decline from the same period in 2023.

According to the U.S. Dairy Export Council, U.S. dairy export volume was down 7 percent in March, year-over-year.

However, \$60 million worth of Idaho ag products in the “prepared vegetables” category, which includes frozen potato products, were exported during the January-March period. That was a 74 percent increase compared with 2023.

Prepared vegetable exports from Idaho to Mexico in the first quarter jumped 191 percent, to \$43 million.

The “edible vegetable” category, which includes fresh potatoes, totaled \$51 million, a 22 percent increase.

Idaho edible vegetable exports to Canada totaled \$18 million, a 26 percent increase. They rose 67 percent (\$7.9 million) to Mexico.

And Idaho exports of live animals soared 98 percent, to \$39 million, during the first quarter. Most of those exports were to Canada. ■

Farm Bureau summer conference draws members from around Idaho

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

ISLAND PARK – Farm Bureau has long been considered the Voice of Agriculture in Idaho.

During Idaho Farm Bureau Federation’s annual Summer Leadership Conference, President Bryan Searle thanked participants for being that voice and encouraged them to continue speaking up for agriculture.

“Isn’t it awesome to belong to an organization where your voice matters?” he said. “What a powerful voice that each one of you has.”

“Thank you for representing the organization so well,” added Searle, who farms near Shelley. “Your involvement makes a difference.”

IFBF Vice President Richard Durrant reminded participants that Farm Bureau is a grassroots organization and that each of their voices is important.

“Each voice counts,” he said. “Grassroots starts with one individual. This is what makes Farm Bureau great – being engaged and being involved.”

The conference brings together Farm Bureau volunteer leaders in various capacities, along with their families, for three days of leadership and policy training and discussions.

Participants, who come from every part of the state, include county Farm Bureau presidents and vice presidents, and members of the state’s Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee and Promotion and Education Committee.

This year’s conference took place July 15-17 in Island Park.

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation policy was a major topic of discussion this year.

“I sure appreciate each of you taking the time to be here because we need good discussion so we have sound policy going forward,” said Durrant, who farms near Meridian. “There are so many issues we deal with and we need to be educated on these issues.”

During a discussion on what county Farm Bureaus can do to develop good policy, participants offered their advice.

“You work together to develop good Farm Bureau policy,” said Val Hammond, president of Fremont County Farm Bureau.

Being familiar with the IFBF policy book was a main piece of advice.

“To develop good policy, you have to know the issues,” said Madison County Farm Bureau President Shaun Blaser. “I do think



Photos by Kylee Urie

TOP: Farm Bureau members from around the state take part in a discussion about the group’s policy book during Idaho Farm Bureau Federation’s annual Summer Leadership Conference.

ABOVE: Participants of Idaho Farm Bureau Federation’s annual Summer Leadership Conference were encouraged to continue speaking up for agriculture.

we need to spend more time reading and understanding our policies.”

Tyler Moore, IFBF’s director of finance and systems, compiled data that shows Idaho Farm Bureau members donated a total of \$908,000 during the past year, up from \$599,000 the previous year.

That included \$291,000 toward 4-H and FFA, \$218,000 in charitable donations, \$227,000 toward scholarships, and \$172,000 for banquets and picnics.

“This is the fruit of our labor. This is what we put back into our communities,” Moore said. “This is what grows Farm Bureau; this is what grows our communities. I’m excited to see what this year brings.”

Farm Bureau Insurance Co. of Idaho was named one of the top 10 places to work this year, CEO Todd Argall told participants. This ranking was based on employee feedback.

“This is a really significant accomplishment and something we’re really proud about,” he said.

He also noted that Idaho Farm Bureau now has more than 86,000 members, an all-time high.

“Our agents are doing a remarkable job (and) it’s happening across the state of Idaho,” Argall said. ■

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Episode 63: It's the "TOT" that Counts

Tater Tots have been a staple around dinner tables, school cafeterias, and restaurants for many decades, but who thought to invent this finger food? It may surprise you how it came to be and what primitive process was used in the beginning to form these tasty snacks. Les Grigg, Co-founder of the F Nephi & Golden Grigg Legacy Foundation, tells us the story of how tater tots came to be, how large the industry is today, and how they are using a tater tot festival to bolster the fight against child abuse (protecting our tots)

