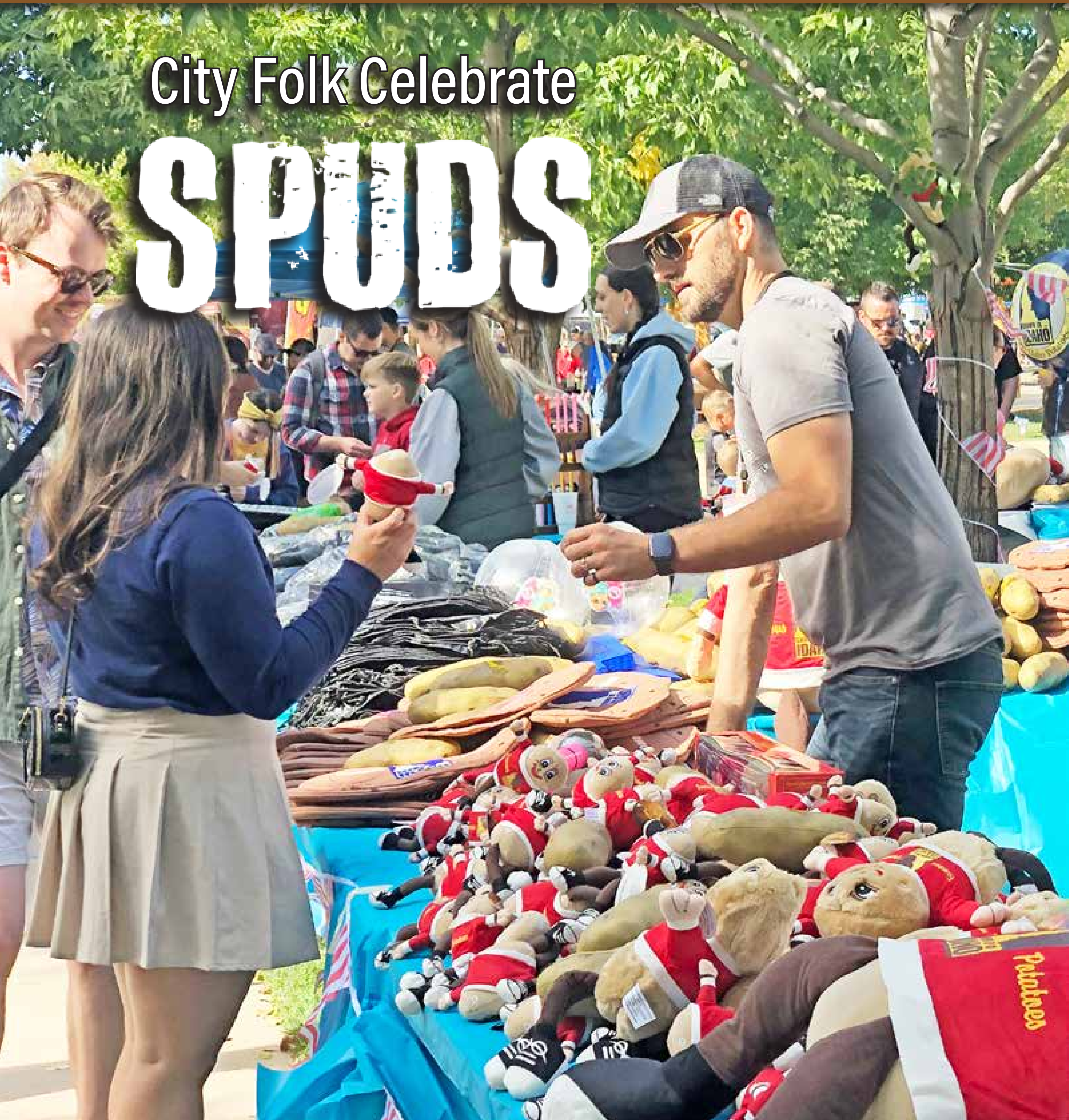
Gem State Producer
Idaho Farm Bureau
September 2024 • Volume 28 Issue 6



City Folk Celebrate SPUDS

The Zipline

By Zippy Duvall
President, American Farm Bureau Federation

Farm Bureau's policy development: From the grassroots up

As of August, our policy development process is heading into full swing. As a grassroots organization, this is the time when our members speak up on challenges they are facing on the farm and within their communities.

Those concerns become policy resolutions, which work their way up through the county, state and, ultimately, the national level. Every policy resolution brought to the floor at the delegate session of the American Farm Bureau Convention in January started with one farmer speaking up.

Farm Bureau stands as the Voice of Agriculture, thanks to this active participation by our members.

From the farm bill and ag labor reform to infrastructure and rural broadband, your American Farm Bureau team is working diligently on a wide array of issues here in Washington.

See **DUVALL,** page 6

The President's Desk

By Bryan Searle
President, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Massive ag trade deficit needs to be fixed

From 1967 to 2018, the U.S. had zero agricultural trade deficits. In fact, we mostly had large agricultural trade surpluses.

Since 2019, however, this nation has had four agricultural trade deficits.

USDA is estimating that the United States will have a record $32 billion agricultural trade deficit in fiscal year 2024, which ends in September. That would follow the previous record ag trade deficit of $16.7 billion set in fiscal year 2023.

The forecast U.S. agricultural trade deficit for fiscal 2024 is shocking.

Yes, the United States needs to import certain food products, such as coffee and some fruits and vegetables, but that big of a trade imbalance is difficult to accept.

Do we really want to get to the point where we are importing the vast majority of our food products? Of course not.

U.S. food security is a national security issue.

See **SEARLE,** page 6

Inside Farm Bureau

By Zak Miller
CEO, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Un-fair fairs

Showing livestock at our fairs is a tradition steeped in community pride, hard work, and the celebration of agriculture.

Participation in these events results from months, if not years, of dedication to raising and caring for animals.

Fair boards and especially livestock committees work to ensure that the rules are meticulously crafted so that each participant follows the same standards, regardless of whether they are showing a prized steer, a lamb, or a poultry breed.

Theoretically, everyone will have an equal chance at winning ribbons, belt buckles, and trophies at the upcoming fair.

However, fairness does not always equate to equity. The resources available to each participant can vary widely. Some may have access to top-notch genetics, superior facilities, high-quality feed, and expert guidance, while others may be working with more modest means.

See **MILLER,** page 7

Idaho Farm Bureau

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Printed by: Adams Publishing Group, Pocatello, ID

GEM STATE PRODUCER

USPS #015-024, is published monthly except the four months the Quarterly runs by the IDAHO FARM BUREAU FEDERATION, 275 Tierra Vista Drive, Pocatello, ID 83201.

POSTMASTER send changes of address to:
GEM STATE PRODUCER
P.O. Box 4848, Pocatello, ID 83205-4848.
Periodicals postage paid at Pocatello, Idaho, and additional mailing offices.
Subscription rate: $6.00 per year included in Farm Bureau dues.

MAGAZINE CONTACTS:
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation
EDITOR (208) 239-4292 • ADS (208) 239-4384
E-MAIL: seanellis@idahofb.org
ADS: advertising@idahofb.org
web: www.idahofb.org

COVER: Potato Days organizer Thomas Watson hands out potato-themed prizes during last year's inaugural Potato Days event in Meridian. See page 8 for a story on the family friendly annual event that celebrates the Idaho spud. Photo by Sean Ellis

Submitted photo

The U.S. potato industry continues to push Japan to allow imports of fresh U.S. potatoes. If that happens, it would result in an additional $150 million per year in exports.

U.S. pushes for fresh potato access in Japan

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – The U.S. potato industry continues to push Japan to allow imports of fresh U.S. potatoes.

Japan is a major destination for processed potatoes from the United States, but it does not allow fresh U.S potato imports.

"It's a big market for processed potatoes and we also received access for chipping potatoes about three years ago," said National Potato Council CEO Kam Quarles. "But there is no fresh table stock potato access."

If the United States is allowed to export fresh potatoes into Japan, it would result in about a 10 percent increase in fresh U.S. potato exports, according to Quarles.

The NPC estimates that if full market access for fresh U.S. potatoes to Japan is realized, it would result in an additional $150 million per year in exports.

Opening Japan to fresh U.S. potato exports would benefit Idaho potato growers and the domestic industry as a whole, according to industry leaders.

"We love markets to export to because that takes some of the pressure off of our domestic supply," said Idaho Potato Commission CEO Jamey Higham. "We think our Idaho brand would be well received in Japan."

See **POTATOES,** page 16

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation photos

Sugar beets are harvested in a field in Cassia County, which ranks No. 1 in Idaho in total farm revenue.

A look at Idaho's top farm counties

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Cassia County leads Idaho when it comes to total farm revenue, but it's not the only county in the state that is big in agriculture.

In fact, if you combine all the state's counties, agriculture in Idaho is a massive industry that underpins the state's overall economy.

According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, Cassia County's farmers and ranchers brought it a total of $1.15 billion in farm-gate revenue during the 2022 census year.

The county gets a substantial amount of its farm revenue from dairy and beef cattle but there are also plenty of crops grown there. In fact, Cassia is big in almost every major ag commodity grown or produced in Idaho, including hay, wheat, sugar beets, silage corn and potatoes.

The county includes major food processing companies as well.

"We've kind of dubbed the area as the Silicon Valley of food," says Sen. Kelly Anthon of Burley, whose district includes the counties of Cassia and Minidoka, which ranks No. 8 ($547 million) when it comes to total farm revenue.

Cassia is followed in the county farm revenue rankings by Twin Falls ($1.14 billion), Gooding ($1.12 billion) and Jerome ($994 million).

All those southcentral Idaho counties derive a lot of their farm revenue from dairy, which is the state's top commodity when it comes to farm-gate revenue.

Rep. Steve Miller, who farms in Fairfield, represents parts of Gooding, Camas and rural Twin Falls counties.

"Agriculture is a major part of the economy in all those counties," he says.

But agriculture isn't just big in the Magic Valley. It's big all over

Idaho and it is the main driver of the state's overall economy, Anthon says.

A recent University of Idaho study, released in January, shows agriculture is responsible for 13 percent of Idaho's total gross state product, as well as one in every nine jobs and 17 percent of total sales.

This includes the direct and indirect impacts of agriculture, including farming, ranching, food processing and all the businesses that owe their existence, or much of it, to agriculture.

"There's nothing in Idaho that can survive without agriculture," says Anthon, who grew up on a sugar beet farm in southcentral Idaho and is heavily involved in agriculture. "Our economy relies on and is driven by successful agricultural businesses. It's easy to see that if agriculture doesn't succeed, our entire economy collapses."

Canyon ($829 million), Elmore ($592 million) and Owyhee ($463 million) counties in southwestern Idaho rank Nos. 5, 6 and 9 in the state in total farm revenue.

Canyon has by far the most farms in Idaho with 2,311 and Ada ranks third in that category with 1,142.

Southwestern Idaho – mainly Canyon County – is also the center of Idaho's $500 million seed industry and it's also one of the world's main seed-producing areas.

Bingham ($576 million) and Jefferson ($381 million) counties in east Idaho rank Nos. 7 and 10.

Sen. Van Burtenshaw, a Terreton farmer whose district includes Jefferson County, said agriculture is the lifeblood of many communities in the region.

"These communities were established around agriculture," he says. The industry "provides … so many things for our communities."

The same thing is true of other east Idaho counties like Bingham, which is the center of the potato universe and produces more spuds than any county in the United States.

"In Bingham County, agriculture is what drives the economy," says Sen. Julie VanOrden, who grew up in agriculture in the area and has been involved with the industry her entire life. "As I look around my community, everything is driven by agriculture. It's huge."

Individual counties in east Idaho may not be quite as big in farming revenue as some of the Magic Valley counties are, but collectively they make the region an agricultural powerhouse.

The east Idaho counties together brought in $2.5 billion in farm-gate revenue during the 2022 ag census year.

In Bingham County alone, there was 898,000 acres of land in farming in 2022, including 136,600 acres of wheat, 80,500 acres of hay, 55,000-plus acres of potatoes and 23,000 acres of barley.

Adjacent Power County had 444,000 acres of land in farming in 2022. Bonneville, Fremont and Jefferson counties combined had 944,000 acres of land in farming.

No counties in north Idaho rank in the top 10 in farm revenue but farmers and ranchers in that part of the state bring in hundreds of millions of dollars in farm-gate revenue each year.

When processing and other indirect impacts of agriculture are factored in, it's safe to say the economic impact of agriculture in north Idaho reaches into the billions of dollars.

Lump them all together and Idaho's 44 counties totaled $10.9 billion in farm revenue in 2022, according to the 2022 Census of Agriculture.

Add in food processing, transportation, labor, etc., and agriculture in Idaho is a massive, widespread industry that touches every other part of the state's economy, more so than it does in neighboring states.

When farm revenue is broken down on a per capita basis – total farm revenue in a state divided by that state's population – Idaho ranks an unchallenged No. 1 among the 11 Western states.

Based on data released by USDA last August, Idaho's per capita farm income number in 2022 was $5,794. No other state in the West was even close to that number. Montana ranked second at $3,939.

That shows that agriculture is far more important to the average Idahoan than it is to residents of other Western states.

"I don't think most people understand just how big a driver of the economy that agriculture is," Burtenshaw says.

"If you're in an urban setting like Boise or Coeur d'Alene, I don't know if you realize just how big the ag industry is in Idaho," says VanOrden, co-owner of Garth VanOrden Farms.

Getting people not involved in the industry, including the state's urbanites, to understand how important agriculture is to Idaho is a large but necessary undertaking, Anthon says.

"We just need to get people educated about how agriculture drives our economy and makes every other business successful," he says. "There has to be some education that takes place." ■

RIGHT: **Potatoes are harvested in a field in Bingham County, which had $576 million in total farm revenue in 2022.**

DUVALL

Continued from page 2

'Our farm and ranch families need a permanent tax code that provides stability and recognizes the unique financial challenges farm businesses face as they work to provide a secure food supply for our nation.'

We rely on you to guide our policy because you know better than anyone what works, and what doesn't, on your farm. That is also why our nation's leaders and elected officials know that when Farm Bureau speaks, we are speaking for farmers and ranchers.

Occasionally, there are new or emerging issues that impact farmers and ranchers, but we don't have specific policy to guide our work. This is when our team in Washington asks for direction directly from our grassroots members via the policymaking process.

With many critical tax benefits for farm and ranch families set to expire in 2025, we are asking members to ensure we have clear policy in light of the potential for severe economic consequences.

We have a second ask of you and it's important. We need farmers and ranchers across the country to meet with lawmakers this year, so they act swiftly to implement the tax reform farmers and ranchers need in 2025.

Tax reform is crucial for ensuring the economic sustainability of our farms and ranches. Lower tax rates, small business deductions and higher estate tax exemptions help our farm families manage finances more effectively, provide opportunities for investment and even help ease the difficult planning for succession.

That is also why we have our eyes fixed on this quickly approaching deadline that will place many of these critical benefits at risk. Without renewal of these benefits, farmers are facing a steep tax increase, and potentially tough decisions going forward.

Our farm and ranch families need a permanent tax code that provides stability and recognizes the unique financial challenges farm businesses face as they work to provide a secure food supply for our nation.

At Farm Bureau, the call for tax reform has come in many forms over the years and we are continuing to work with, and on behalf of our members, to get a solution before the 2025 deadline.

That is also why addressing the tax concerns through the policy development process is a top priority. We want to hear from our members about how these issues are impacting your farms and ranches directly.

This feedback not only helps us work on your behalf but also gives us farmer and rancher stories – powerful testimonials – we can share to ensure all lawmakers understand the impact of tax reform on farm and ranch families across the country.

This is your Farm Bureau, and these are your policies.

Together, we will continue to shape the future of American agriculture and ensure that our farms, ranches and rural communities thrive for generations to come.

I am deeply grateful for the hard work and dedication you put into shaping our great organization at the local, state and national levels and am eager to see what comes from this year's policy development process. ■

SEARLE

Continued from page 2

U.S. farmers are rightfully concerned about this development, since trade plays an important role in the success of American agriculture.

Exacerbating difficulties on the trade front, farm commodity prices are on the decline while overall farm input costs, already at record levels, are on the rise.

USDA estimates that total U.S. farm cash receipts – this is what the farmer or rancher receives directly for their commodity – will be down 4%, or $21 billion, this year.

At the same time, total U.S. farm production expenses are expected to increase by 4 percent, or $17 billion, and total federal government payments to farmers and ranchers are forecast to be down 16%.

Add it all up, and total U.S. net farm income is forecast to be down by a whopping 25%, or $40 billion.

As an example of how bad things are for some farmers, consider how some agricultural producers in north Idaho and east Washington are currently having to stockpile wheat outside in open-air piles because they could only move about half their crop from last year.

Continued headwinds on the trade front do not help. Our

'With farm level commodity prices dropping and input costs rising, it doesn't take a brain surgeon to see what's coming if things don't change.'

continued and expanding agricultural trade deficits show that something is not working.

We need to find new and expanding foreign markets for U.S. farm products and we need to do that quickly.

The United States has had no new free trade agreements since 2012. New FTAs would be one way to address this challenge.

Another would be to increase funding for USDA's Market Access and Foreign Market Development programs (MAP and FMD).

Funding for these programs, which support agricultural export efforts, has not been increased since 2006 and 2002, respectively.

Certain farm bill proposals in the House and Senate seek to double funding for these programs.

Whatever policy changes need to occur to address this issue need to happen now, or at least very soon.

With farm level commodity prices dropping and input costs rising, it doesn't take a brain surgeon to see what's coming if things don't change.

Making it in agriculture today is difficult enough for established farmers and ranchers.

But the current economic situation in the industry makes it almost impossible for young people, or anyone else for that matter, to get involved in farming and ranching.

American Farm Bureau Federation, with the help of the various state Farm Bureaus and other ag groups, will continue to address this serious issue.

Let's all get on board with efforts to return the United States to agricultural trade surpluses. ■

MILLER

Continued from page 2

This disparity can lead to significant differences in the condition and presentation of the animals, even though the rules apply equally to all.

The competition is fair because everyone abides by the same rules. Still, it is not equitable because not everyone has the same opportunities or resources to prepare.

Every volunteer at a livestock show hopes that the rules create a level playing field. Contestants are judged based on how well their animals conform to breed standards, the quality of their care, and the skill with which they present their animals in the ring.

Every participant knows the rules and what is expected of them, and no one is allowed an unfair advantage.

Fairness is much easier to achieve before the animals enter the ring than once the gate is shut and the judging begins. It quickly becomes evident that while the rules governing these competitions are designed to be fair, they are not always equitable.

The outcomes, influenced by the unpredictable nature of animals, circumstances, and judges, do not always and may rarely deliver fair results. Factors beyond the control of the participants influence the outcomes of these competitions.

'May we all remember that as un-fair a fair may be, the real prize for all of us is great kids showing good animals; those results are not as quick or as evident, but the reward when it comes is worth all the sweat, dirt, frustration, and tears that these un-fair fairs can offer.'

Livestock are living creatures, each with their own temperaments and quirks. A steer that performs perfectly in practice might spook in the ring, or a pig that has always been easy to handle might suddenly become uncooperative.

These unpredictable elements can alter the results, leading to situations where the most deserving participant, in terms of effort and care, may not take home the blue ribbon.

The judging process, while fair, cannot always account for these variables, leading to outcomes that may not seem just to all participants.

I have never been to a fair where any parent or competitor complained of unfairness by the judge. (Please excuse my tongue-in-cheek moment.)

There are few things like having one's heart broken at the fair by an ornery steer or flighty lamb to help a young person (and a few of us less young people) remember that life is not fair.

It is a reminder that in life, we really can control little. There are times when we must confront the fact that our time, grit, and determination were still not enough, and all we can do is try again next year, not as losers or failures but as resilient kids doing the best they can.

Showing livestock is a testament to hard work, dedication, and the rich agricultural heritage of a community. May we all remember that as un-fair a fair may be, the real prize for all of us is great kids showing good animals; those results are not as quick or as evident, but the reward when it comes is worth all the sweat, dirt, frustration, and tears that these un-fair fairs can offer. ■

POTATO DAYS CELEBRATION IN MERIDIAN GROWS EVEN BIGGER

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

MERIDIAN – The organizers of last year's inaugural Potato Days event in Meridian had no idea how many people would show up.

They were hoping between 1,000 and 3,000 people would attend the new event, which was created to celebrate Idaho's most famous product in the state's most urban setting.

But the event ended up drawing an estimated 12,000 people and organizers quickly realized they were on to something special. Apparently, even the state's city folk have a special love for Idaho potatoes.

This year's Potato Days event is expected to draw around 25,000 people. The event's stated goal of becoming the largest public celebration of the potato in Idaho may be achieved during its second year.

It will take place Sept. 20 -22 at Kleiner Memorial Park, just across from The Village in Meridian.

"It's the same event as last year, just bigger," said Thomas Watson, director of Idaho Business Alliance, which is organizing Potato Days.

He said the main purpose of the event is to celebrate Idaho's most famous commodity in the state's largest urban setting.

Idaho leads the nation in total potato production and the state's farmers produce about 14 billion pounds of spuds each year.

Potato production and processing bring in billions of dollars to the state's economy.

Watson said organizers were surprised to discover there was no event in the Boise area celebrating potatoes.

In some rural parts of Idaho, the potato is openly celebrated and honored. Watson said Potato Days organizers felt the spud should also be recognized and celebrated by urbanites.

The inaugural Potato Days celebration in Meridian last year drew thousands of people.
Photos by Sean Ellis

"It was a missing thing that we believed should be in the Meridian-Boise area," Watson said.

Apparently, urbanites feel the same way.

Shortly after Potato Days began last year, thousands of people began flowing into Kleiner Park, stunning organizers.

"Everybody on our team was shocked at the turnout," Watson said. "We were mouth-wide-open shocked."

Potato Days is an unabashed celebration of the humble Idaho potato.

It includes dozens of potato-themed games such as potato sack races, potato limbo, potato darts and potato trick shots, potato dishes, and the free prizes awarded for playing the games are all potato-oriented.

Twice as many free toys will be given away at this year's event.

It includes a potato sidewalk chalk art contest by dozens of local artists, a French-fry competition, live bands, carnival games, a vendor area, bubble garden and bouncy houses.

Everything about the celebration is potato-themed. This year, a piano dressed up as a potato will be towed to the center of the park and anyone can play on it.

A brand-new Ford F-250 truck will be raffled off at Potato Days this year. Tickets for that raffle will go on sale beginning Aug. 22 and will also be sold during the day of the event.

"Someone is going to drive it off the lot," Watson said.

All proceeds from the raffle will go to the Idaho Playground Project, which builds playgrounds at schools around the state where funding is not available.

There were 60 vendors at last year's Potato Days event but there are already 300 so far this year.

There will be 40 food trucks and each one has to have at least one potato-themed item on its menu.

The event is free and is designed to be family friendly.

"I have kids and parents are always looking for a fun, annual tradition for the family to look forward to," Watson said.

"We want to build something that kids and their parents can look forward to every year."

"We have been reached out to by dozens of families and business owners that are happy that Potato Days is being celebrated near The Village and is an event they can come back to every year," he added. "I think we've created a new family tradition for Idahoans."

Idaho spud farmers are happy to hear that the urban part of the state is celebrating the potato.

"What a wonderful event. As a potato grower, I am very happy to hear that the humble spud is being honored and celebrated in Idaho's largest urban area," said Idaho Farm Bureau Federation President Bryan Searle, who farms in East Idaho. "The fact that it is a family friendly event makes it even more special."

The event takes place from 5 p.m. to dark on Friday, Sept. 20, and from sunup to sundown on Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 21 and 22.

For more information about Potato Days, call Watson at (208) 513-4419. ■

Grasshoppers eating into Western farmers' and ranchers' bottom lines

By Daniel Munch
AFBF Economist

When learning U.S. history, narratives of vast swarms of locusts ravaging millions of acres of farmland are often recounted.

Not all grasshoppers are locusts, and the swarms aren't quite as big as they were in the 1800s, but grasshoppers and Mormon crickets remain a persistent risk to agriculture, inflicting significant damage to rangeland and crops.

This article provides an overview of these insects' economic impact on agriculture in the West and efforts to manage and mitigate their populations.

Background

Almost 400 native species of grasshoppers inhabit the Western United States, though only a small fraction (about 12 species) are considered pests.

Grasshoppers compete with cattle and other herbivores, including wildlife like deer and elk, for forage and are more likely to become a threat in areas with less than 30 inches of rainfall annually. They can consume up to 50% of their body weight each day in forage (while cattle consume 1.5-2.5% of their body weight).

Put differently, just 30 pounds of grasshoppers will eat as much as a 600-pound steer in a day.

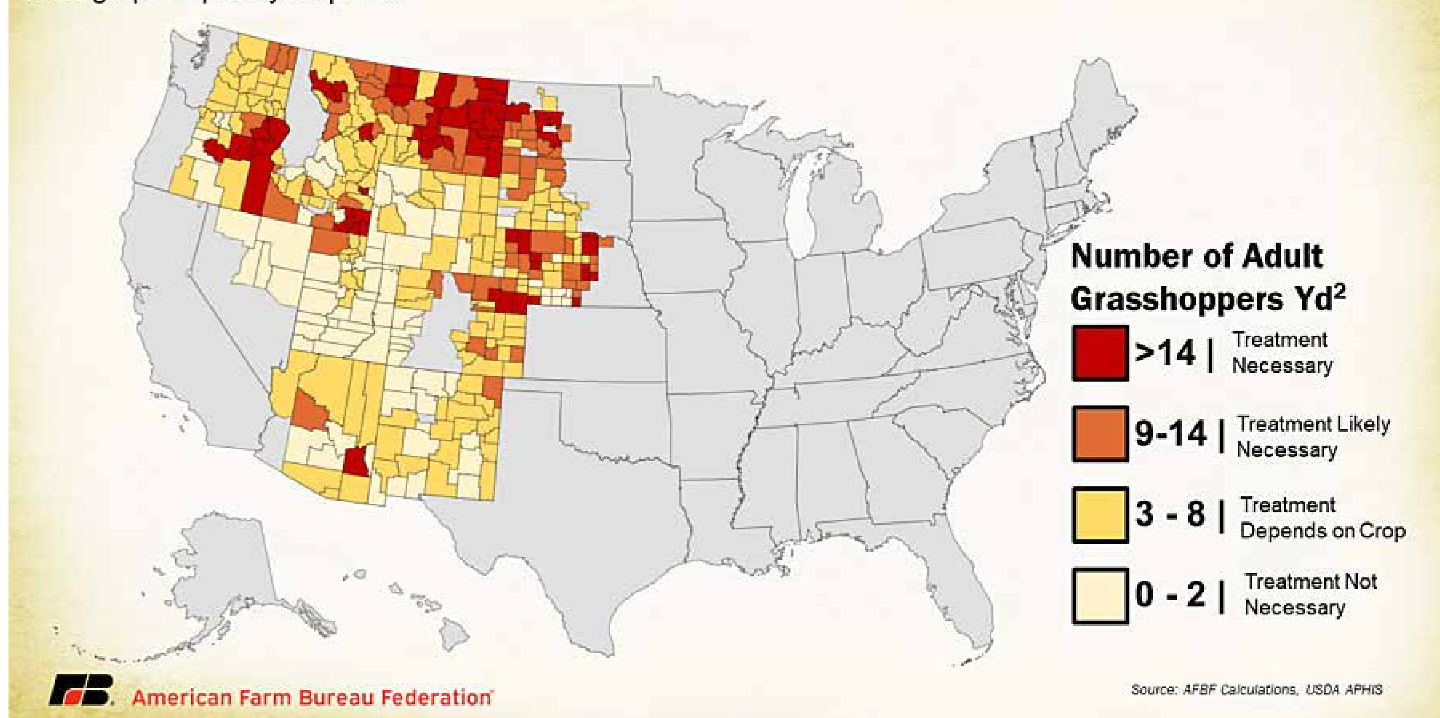
Grasshoppers are an even bigger menace to crop farmers and ranchers on public and private lands when drought conditions are added to the mix.

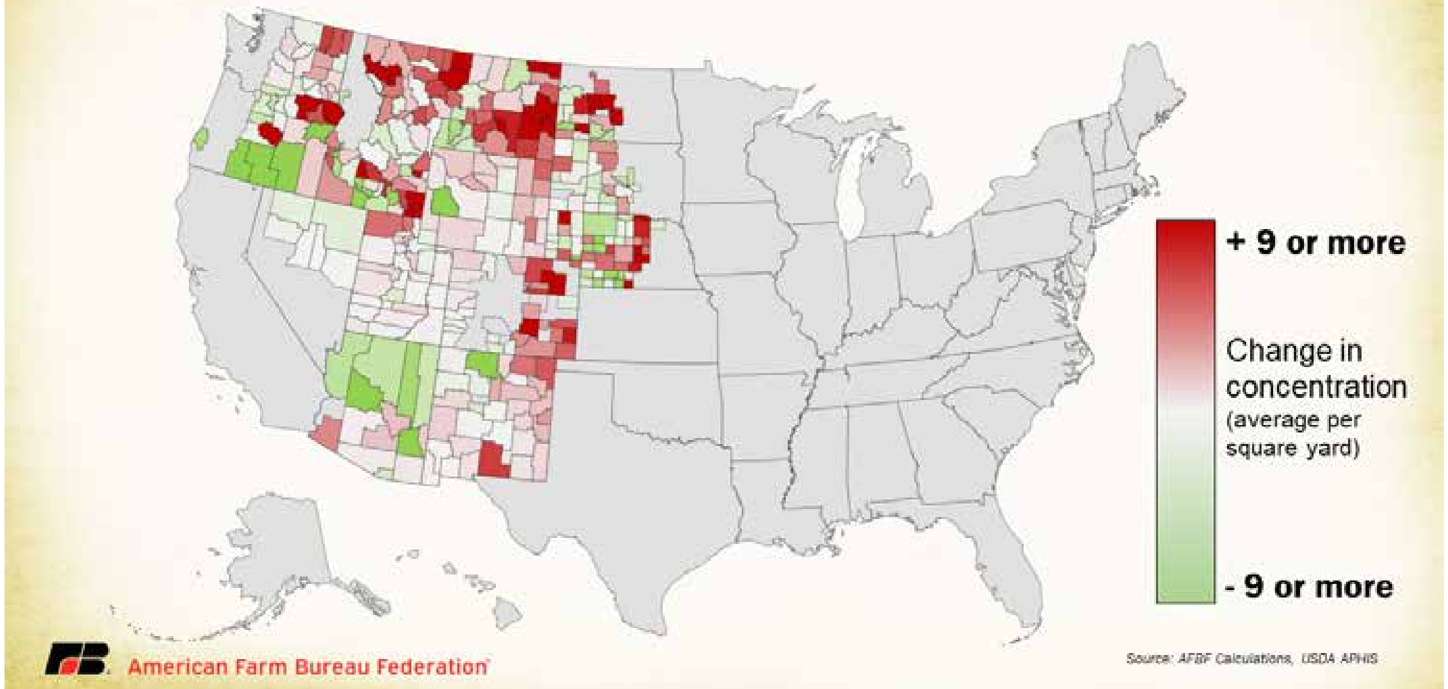
Most species of grasshoppers and Mormon crickets produce one generation each year and go through a three-stage life cycle – egg, nymph and adult. In most cases, eggs are deposited in soil in "pods" that contain eight to 30 eggs in late summer or fall.

The eggs pause development over winter and resume in spring. Depending on soil temperature – warmer temperatures speed up this process greatly – eggs hatch sometime in the spring. Once hatched, the nymphs begin feeding within a day.

During this portion of their life grasshoppers are most susceptible to the impacts of weather, disease and parasites.

Nymphs become adults within 40-55 days of hatching. These lifecycle characteristics are important for predicting possible population booms, depending on weather, as well as effective management techniques.





Grasshopper and cricket outbreaks not only result in the physical destruction of forage and crops but also contribute to soil erosion and degradation, disrupt rangeland nutrient cycles, and impede rangeland water filtration, which can have lasting impacts on rangeland ecosystems.

Western landowners face heightened risks from grasshoppers due to the substantial amount of federally owned land in the region. Pest infestations on federal lands reduce the quantity and quality of forage available for those with public lands grazing leases.

In the absence of grasshopper and cricket management on federal lands, insects can migrate onto private lands, undermining the effectiveness of common private pest management efforts.

This movement from public to private lands complicates the control of these pests.

Population densities

Through the Plant Protection Act of 2000, USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has the congressional mandate to control grasshoppers on rangelands via the Rangeland Grasshopper and Mormon Cricket Suppression Program.

One important step of this process is monitoring nymph and adult populations of grasshoppers and Mormon crickets through surveying. The square yard method establishes an average quantity of nymph and adult insects per yard over about 30 samples per county.

Figure 1 displays the population densities of adult grasshoppers in counties with APHIS surveys in 2023. Numerous counties and states not surveyed, including California, Kansas and Oklahoma, have significant grasshopper populations so these graphics should be used as a baseline.

Figure 2 shows the difference in per yard populations from counties with surveys between 2022 and 2023. Almost 10% of surveyed counties (34 out of 355) experienced adult grasshopper population increases of 9 or more per square yard, an increase within the threshold for pest treatment.

A decrease in grasshopper populations between years may be linked to many factors including increased precipitation, stronger disease pressure or successful treatment efforts, while an increase may be a result of the opposite.

Mormon crickets are a flightless type of katydid that walk or jump in groups of millions or billions of individual crickets and can migrate great distances.

The Mormon cricket is the only katydid species known to reach outbreak level populations in the United States and, like grasshoppers, damage grasses and other crops through consumption.

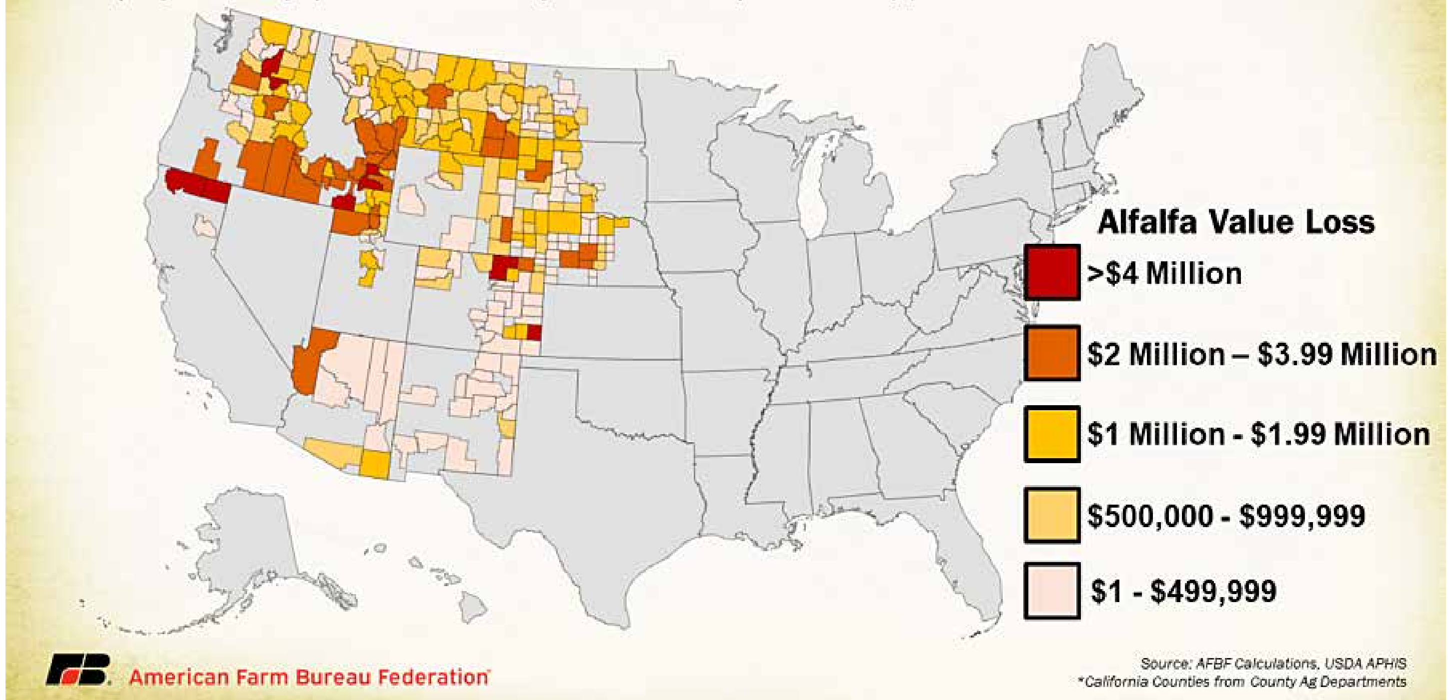
They're also a large nuisance in rural communities where they blanket roads, homes and sidewalks.

Economic impact

Literature on current economic impacts of grasshoppers on agriculture is limited.

Generally, monetary losses either fall under the value of crops or rangeland consumed by insects that could no longer be sold on the market or consumed by ruminants to produce meat or wool and the cost to treat populations that have reached pest-concern levels.

Speaking to the former, county-level estimates of grasshopper



damage to crops and rangeland are available in some states. For example, 2023 California County Agricultural Commissioner Disaster Reports are available (by request) from several impacted northern counties in the state (Siskiyou, Modoc and Plumas).

These forms are used when requesting a USDA secretarial disaster declaration and list the crops damaged, yield losses and corresponding dollar losses from available pricing information.

In Modoc County alone, ag commissioner estimations indicated over $52 million in crop and rangeland losses due to severe grasshopper infestations in 2023.

This included $16 million in damage to alfalfa, which had a yield decrease from 6.4 tons per acre to 4.48 tons per acre (-30%) across 7,280 of Modoc's 36,400 planted alfalfa acres (20% of acreage impacted).

On 180,000 acres of rangeland, which usually supports 2 animal unit months (AUMs) per acre, only 0.6 AUMs per acre were supported, resulting in an estimated loss of over $10 million in forage value.

An AUM is the amount of forage needed to sustain one cow and her calf or one horse, or five sheep or goats for a month.

Modoc County estimations also included $15 million in grain hay yield losses, $6 million in lost pasture forage value, $2 million in small grain yield losses and $1.8 million in other hay yield losses.

In Siskiyou County, conservative estimates of crop and forage yield losses exceeded $32 million and in Plumas County they were over $1 million.

The impact of grasshoppers on crop and forage yields will vary widely by location and depend on factors including weather conditions, vegetation densities and types and altitude.

Recognizing these differences, one crude method to estimate a baseline economic impact number of grasshopper infestations across the West is to extrapolate average yield losses and affected acreage values observed in the described California counties to other infested counties.

Focusing on a single crop type and selecting counties with over three adult grasshoppers per yard (where treatment may be necessary depending on the crop) reduces the risk of overestimating actual losses since many crop and forage types are affected by grasshopper infestations.

Following this approach, alfalfa, having been impacted in all reported California counties and commonly grown in the West adjacent to or near federal lands, was selected as the crop to analyze.

Adjusting for yield loss and acreage impacted gives an average total county production loss of 6%.

Utilizing data from the 2022 Census of Agriculture, county-level survey data on alfalfa production, and total sales value by state, we calculated the difference in production value per county, assuming a 6% increase in production in the absence of grasshopper infestations.

Figure 5 displays the per-county estimations of lost alfalfa values.

In total, conservative estimates put production value losses in 2023 due to grasshopper infestations at $318 million.

This represents a baseline number with true impacts likely hundreds of millions of dollars higher. Losses of this magnitude

are detrimental to operations already operating on small and often negative margins and reveal the true threat of these insects on farmers' and ranchers' livelihoods.

Another way to pinpoint some grasshopper damages is through Risk Management Agency indemnity data that shows payments made on crop insurance policies triggered from an insect-related cause of loss.

In Montana, for instance, there were $7.7 million in indemnity payments made for crops lost to insects in 2023. This includes over $5 million in wheat, more than $1.6 million in dry peas and $439,725 in barley.

All counties with reported insect-related indemnity payments had significant densities of grasshoppers reported by APHIS surveys, though some of these payments could have been for other pest types.

Treatment

The Rangeland Grasshopper and Mormon Cricket Suppression Program offers treatments for federal, state and private rangelands through a cost-share model within APHIS.

Under this program, when funding is available:

- APHIS covers 100% of the treatment costs on federal and tribal rangelands.
- On state lands, APHIS provides 50% of the funds for treatment and control, with the state covering the remaining 50%.
- For private rangelands, APHIS contributes 33.3% of the funding, while the state and private landowner share the remaining costs.

It's important to note that APHIS is unable to conduct suppression programs for grasshoppers and Mormon crickets on private croplands.

However, they do perform rangeland suppression treatments in areas where federally managed rangeland is directly adjacent to private croplands.

Before APHIS treats for grasshoppers or Mormon crickets on rangelands, two things need to happen.

First, APHIS must receive a written request from the landowner or manager for treatment, and second, APHIS must determine that the treatment will effectively suppress grasshopper and Mormon cricket populations to levels that will not cause significant forage loss and ecological damage.

When a written request is made, APHIS visits the site and assesses certain factors to determine if treatment is necessary.

Part of this process is the population density surveying described earlier and reviewing treatment options and costs.

If funding is available, a written request has been received and treatment is deemed necessary, a treatment plan will be submitted for bids by pest control contractors.

APHIS will select a contractor for each treatment. There may be limited contractors offering grasshopper treatment services, leading to reduced competition and potentially higher treatment costs.

APHIS may apply insecticides using several different methods. Using ground equipment by distributing baits usually made out of wheat bran or rolled oats and carbaryl or aerially by spraying ultra-low-volume applications on treated acres.

Most commonly, APHIS uses a method of integrated pest management for grasshoppers and crickets called reduced area and agent treatments to limit costs and insecticide use.

This approach divides treated acres into a patchwork of treated swaths and untreated swaths. Insects in treated acres are killed directly and insects in untreated area are killed as they move between untreated and treated swaths.

This approach reduces the cost of control by more than 50% and provides 80%-95% protection.

Insecticides utilized by APHIS include carbaryl, diflubenzuron and malathion. Diflubenzuron is most commonly used because its risk to non-target terrestrial species and aquatic life is low and its effectiveness as an insect growth inhibitor is high.

All insecticides are currently registered for use and labeled by the Environmental Protection Agency for rangeland control of grasshoppers. Each pesticide used is effective and safe when used under the right conditions in accordance with label requirements.

Between 2019 and 2023, APHIS protected over 3.33 million acres across eight Western states, with 2.8 million acres treated for grasshopper control and 482,000 acres treated for Mormon crickets.

This has corresponded to $5.68 million in program treatment expenditures over the five-year span ($4.6 million for grasshopper control and $1.07 million for Mormon crickets).

Data on whether treatments were on federal, state or private acres is not available, so the cost paid by states or landowners is not known.

Nearly 70% ($3.13 million) of treatment costs were spent in Montana, primarily in 2021 when over $2 million was spent across 10 counties.

Mormon cricket control costs have been split primarily between Nevada ($482,000) and Idaho ($423,000), with most of the remainder in Oregon ($157,000).

Summary

Even in the 21st century, outbreaks of grasshoppers and Mormon crickets pose a threat to Western U.S. agriculture.

The economic impact of these insects on rangeland and crops remains significant, with millions of dollars in losses reported annually across affected counties.

This analysis only scratches the surface in terms of total economic damages due to the limited data available and isolated surveying.

Efforts to manage and mitigate grasshopper populations, led by APHIS through the Rangeland Grasshopper and Mormon Cricket Suppression Program, involve sophisticated monitoring and targeted treatments.

Continued coordination and efforts among the federal government, states and private landowners is essential to safeguarding the livelihoods of farmers and ranchers against these small but hungry pests. ■

Photo by Sean Ellis

Beans are harvested in a field near Wilder.

Commission proposes raising bean assessment

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

GLENNS FERRY – The Idaho Bean Commission in the coming year will likely seek to update the state statute that authorizes the commission and outlines its responsibilities.

If industry supports that effort, the commission will begin moving forward with it in December, said IBC executive director Andi Woolf-Weibye.

If there is an effort to change the statute, it would occur during the 2025 legislative session, which begins in January.

As part of that statute change effort, the IBC is also asking for industry input on a proposal to increase the state's bean assessment to help cover rapidly rising costs.

Raising the assessment would require revising the statute that authorizes the commission.

“We're still working on the same funds that we had 30 years ago. Meanwhile, the cost of everything that we do…has almost doubled in price.”

– B.J. Metzger, IBC commissioner

The assessment is what Idaho bean farmers and dealers pay to fund the IBC, which was created by the industry in 1949 to promote and market beans grown in the state, as well as to help fund research important to the industry.

Currently, Idaho farmers pay an assessment of 8 cents for every 100 pounds of beans they produce, and the state’s bean dealers pay 4 cents for every 100 pounds of beans they process.

The IBC is proposing to raise the assessment that bean dealers pay to 8 cents per 100 pounds of beans processed.

“I think it just makes it fair to have industry have an equal assessment as growers,” said Monty Hamilton, one of the IBC’s eight commissioners. “That's where we're trying to take things.”

The IBC is made up of four bean growers and four bean dealers.

Besides making the assessment equal among growers and dealers, the commission feels it is necessary to raise it because of significant cost increases over the past several years, Woolf-Weibye said.

“Particularly over the last few years, costs have gone up significantly,” Woolf-Weibye said. “If you want to do business and you want to stay relevant, you have to keep pace with these costs.”

The state’s bean assessment has not been raised since 1992 and “a lot has changed in 30 years and particularly in the last five years,” Hamilton said. “Anything that we do now costs 30 or 40% more than it did four years ago.”

The commission’s budget has been severely impacted by increasing costs, as well as a significant reduction in total bean acreage in Idaho over the last few years, Hamilton said.

“Bean acres are volatile and when they’re low, that really hurts the commissions budget,” he said.

Nobody wants to be taxed more but most people realize that an increase in the assessment is necessary at this point, Hamilton said.

“So far, all the industry feedback that I have received has been supportive of an increase,” he said. “They understand that costs have gone up.”

“The dollar is not worth what it used to be,” said IBC commissioner B.J. Metzger. “We're still working on the same funds that we had 30 years ago. Meanwhile, the cost of everything that we do … has almost doubled in price.”

He said the commission’s budget has “dwindled over the past few years to the point where we can't do all the research and other things that we are charged with doing as a commission.”

He also said he has not heard any significant pushback from industry on the proposal.

“I haven't heard any blowback,” Metzger said. “I haven't heard a lot of people jumping up and down for it, either. But I haven't heard anybody say that they're going to fight it or disagree with it.”

If it is approved, the new assessment would go into effect at the beginning of next July.

In its effort to update the statute, the commission seeks to clean up some of its language.

“Some of that verbiage is really outdated and some of it hasn't been updated since 1957,” Woolf-Weibye said.

One revision to the statute might include authorizing the commission to increase the assessment up or down. What the ceiling is for that, up or down, has not been determined yet.

Woolf-Weibye said the commission is trying to get word out about the proposal as much as possible to give industry a chance to weigh in on it.

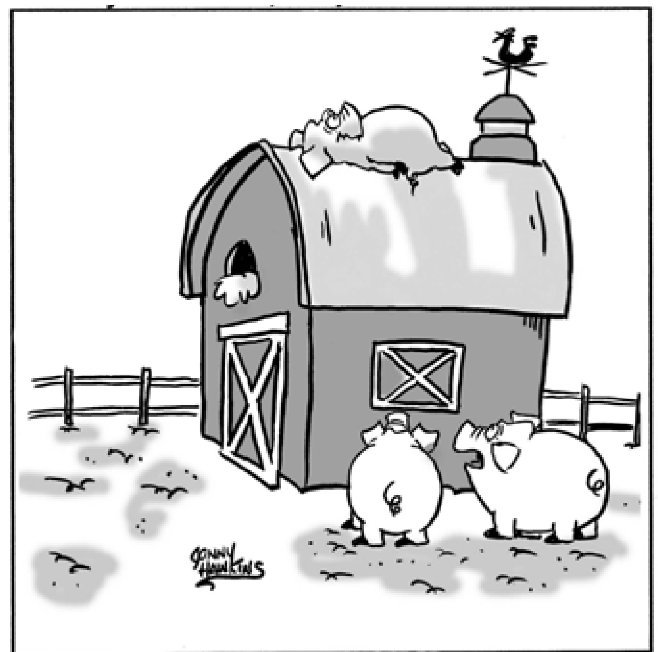
“Getting the word out to industry is our main goal,” she said. “We want to know if this is a viable thing or, if industry is totally against it, we'll table it.”

So far, industry has not opposed the proposal, she said.

“A lot of them are like, ‘We don't love it but we get it,’” she said. “They understand that costs have increased a lot the last few years, let alone the last few decades.” ■

Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins



“Sun-baked ham is less desirable than honey-baked ham.”

Continued from page 3

Idaho leads the nation in total potato production. Spuds are the state's top crop in terms of total revenue and it's the product that Idaho is most famous for.

Idaho farmers produce about 14 billion pounds of potatoes every year, which is about a third of the nation's total spud supply.

According to a first-of-its-kind NPC report, the U.S. potato sector had an estimated $101 billion impact on the nation's economy in 2021.

According to that "Spud Nation" report, about 20% of American potatoes are exported, which results in an almost $4.8 billion economic impact on the nation's economy and supports almost 34,000 jobs.

The report also found that export markets are an important avenue for the U.S. potato sector. About 20 percent of the spuds grown in the United States are exported, either as fresh or processed potatoes.

On April 11, a bipartisan group of 10 U.S. senators, including both of Idaho's senators, sent a letter to the president urging him to continue to push Japan to allow access to fresh U.S. potatoes.

According to the letter, fresh potato access to Japan was first requested almost three decades ago.

Despite the efforts of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Farming and Fisheries (MAFF) "continues to delay substantive technical discussions on table stock access," the letter states.

"This marks the fifth year of discussions without any forward progress by MAFF to resolve this decades-long issue," it adds.

The bipartisan letter states that there is "no valid phytosanitary justification for these delays, as the U.S. potato industry has a strong history of exporting fresh potatoes to many markets, including South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand. These exports occur safely and routinely throughout the year, providing benefits both for consumers in the Indo-Pacific and our growers here in the United States."

During the week of Sept. 16, there will be another bilateral meeting between APHIS and MAFF, in Idaho Falls.

That will present another opportunity to keep pressuring Japan on this issue, said Quarles, who was in Tokyo last year for the groups' annual bilateral meeting.

"Japan has just stalled the negotiations," he said. "We have to maintain the pressure on (them). There is no legitimate reason for them refusing to negotiate. It's purely protectionism … I don't think Japan can ignore their international obligations forever." ■

Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins

Spec Tater

"I think you're about due for a vacation, Clem."

The purpose of the I Farm, I Vote and the I Eat, I Vote campaign is to provide information to voters about candidates they will be voting for in the upcoming election. Agriculture is Idaho's largest economic sector and the lifeblood of rural communities. Elected officials impact all aspects of rural life and business, from taxes and environmental regulations to property rights and transportation.

For candidate information please visit IFarmIVoteIdaho.com or scan QR code

Your referral, like Shay's, could be worth $525.

Get $500 IF YOU WIN OUR QUARTERLY DRAWING*

Get $25 WHEN A FRIEND YOU REFER PURCHASES A POLICY FROM US

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.

U of I workshop prepares beginning ranchers

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

MOSCOW, Idaho – McKenna Knott, of Moscow, is a recent high school graduate who raises show calves and would like to grow and improve her small herd.

Tom Fitzsimmons, of Pomeroy, Wash., began raising cattle after he retired from farming crops. He and his wife Jamie now have a herd of more than 100 head.

They were among a group of beginning ranchers from varying backgrounds and stages in life who sought to broaden their skillsets through a recent three-day Beef 101 workshop, offered by a team of University of Idaho meat science researchers.

The training caters to ranchers who have entered the industry within the past decade and is funded with a three-year, $479,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

Knott and Fitzsimmons participated in the July 8-10 Beef 101 workshop, which was organized due to high demand after the initial May session filled all 30 slots quickly.

Photos by John O'Connell

Phil Bass, associate professor of meat science, teaches beginning ranchers enrolled in a Beef 101 course offered by University of Idaho in Moscow about meat cutting.

The U of I experts covered the basics of livestock breeding, genetic selection, animal health, grazing, land management, diversifying a business, financial planning, beef quality assurance, vaccinations, food safety, beef markets and livestock evaluation.

Beef 101 also funds several one-day workshops on specific topics, often hosted in conjunction with county beef schools.

"Coming here, I hope to gain more knowledge about how I can increase my herd and have a better economics standpoint and the knowledge I need to continue improving my stock and genetics to help local showmen," said Knott, who plans to take agriculture classes next fall at Linn-Benton Community College in Albany, Ore.

Fitzsimmons had cattle on his family farm as a child and wanted to relive those memories. After he retired from farming, he purchased some cattle with funds from selling equipment, and he recently bought a cattle ranch.

"This is the first time I've seen the actual processing of an animal," Fitzsimmons said after trying his hand at meat cutting during the workshop's final day. "It's something you kind of know happens, but to understand it and see the whole process and better understand what you're involved in, that was worth it."

Participants in the workshops will have the opportunity to have soil and forage samples from their operations analyzed.

The grant also pairs new ranchers with experienced mentors in the industry and will cover site visits, during which experts from the team will go to individual operations to make assessments.

Scholarships are available to help participants cover mileage, hotels and other travel costs. Grant funding also purchased teaching tools, such as a replica cow used to demonstrate fetal dystocia, which occurs when abnormal fetal size or positioning complicates delivery.

The team hosted a contest to name the artificial cow, which is now called Birth-a.

The $20 workshop fee includes meals and gifts for participants, such as a butcher knife. The team plans to add leadership-development content and a more advanced Beef 201 workshop next year.

"We have folks who have one or two animals and are brand new to the thing and folks who are part of a family ranch with several hundred to 1,000 head," said Phil Bass, an associate professor of meat science and the grant's principal investigator. "It's the full spectrum."

Jessie Van Buren, a UI Extension educator serving Latah County, had the primary responsibility for writing the grant.

"I cut the beef up myself and I want to get better at processing it. What I saw here was clean processing and humane handling of the beef."

– Anna McKanna, Potlach rancher

She comes from an extended family of ranchers and relied heavily on their input about what to include in workshops. She also surveyed about 60 people with ties to ranching.

Several of her uncles are serving as program mentors, as well as on an advisory board to provide continuing direction for the grant.

At the suggestion of Van Buren's relatives, cull cows provided by the university for the workshops' meat-cutting training were ground into hamburger and donated to the Idaho Food Bank in Lewiston.

The workshops have drawn participants from throughout Idaho, Washington, Oregon and Montana, and even one participant from Texas, Jennifer Howard.

Howard plans to move to northern Idaho and start a small herd for personal consumption and direct-to-consumer sales.

"I'm looking to enter the cattle industry mostly to have control over my food source – being able to select it and be in control of what is fed to animals I will eat myself to improve my health and food security," Howard said.

Winston Peterson, of Peck, started a small cow-calf operation near Lewiston and is eager to apply his new skills from Beef 101 in the field to increase his profits.

"I'm looking to grow into a bigger operation I can rely on for my main source of income," Peterson said.

Leah Gurske-Hill, of Spangle, Wash., started with a pair of animals and has built her herd up to 17. She sells live animals to consumers, who work directly with a butcher to have their beef processed.

Gurske-Hill learned about the program through the Washington Cattle Association's webpage.

"We couldn't beat the price and knowledge is power," Gurske-Hill said. "I brought a friend down with me, and we're enjoying the bejesus out of it. I'd never seen the butchering process, and the beef quality assurance was fascinating."

Anna McKanna, of Potlatch, raises cattle solely for personal use and to supply beef to family. She personally slaughters a couple of animals per year.

"I cut the beef up myself and I want to get better at processing it," she said. "What I saw here was clean processing and humane handling of the beef."

Mikaela and Dustin Swall, with Bear Grace Ranch in Caldwell, are part of a family operation with more than 100 cow-calf pairs and a 300- to 400-head feedlot.

They sell animals directly to the consumer, an area they believe future Beef 101 workshops should emphasize.

They have taken several ideas from the workshop to apply to their ranch operations, and they highly recommend the program.

"Just more of the animal handling techniques are some of the things we plan to implement differently. We have a couple of ideas going forward on how we're going to be dealing with our vaccinations and castrations," Mikaela Swall said. "I loved being on the cutting-room floor. That was the coolest thing to me. I learned so much about why certain cuts are the way they are and where they're located."

The U of I team includes Jessie Van Buren, Michael Colle, Lauren Christensen, Meranda Small, Audra Cochran, Brett Wilder and Phil Bass. ■

RIGHT: **Micaela Swall, of Bear Grace Ranch in Caldwell, practices meat cutting during the Beef 101 course offered recently by University of Idaho in Moscow.**

Seven Elzinga daughters indispensable to Alderspring Ranch in Pahsimeroi Valley

By Dianna Troyer
For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Photo courtesy of Alderspring Ranchl

Glenn and Caryl Elzinga's daughters are from left Linnaea, Becky, Maddy, Melanie, Annie, Emily, and Abigail.

Whenever they need help, Glenn and Caryl Elzinga turn to their seven daughters at Alderspring Ranch in central Idaho's remote Pahsimeroi Valley.

Their efficient family members with a diverse skillset help move cattle, take turns living with the herd in summer to ward off wolves, package orders for their organic grass-fed beef, write blogs, and maintain their website and social media.

The Elzingas market about 400 head annually through direct internet sales and natural food stores. The ranch encompasses 2,500 acres of deeded ground and 46,000 acres of grazing permits with the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service.

Along with their daughters and three sons-in-law, they have four full-time ranch hands and several seasonal summer workers.

The daughters supervise the ranch's summer internship program.

"We're excited to have our largest summer intern crew ever –19," Glenn said. "They come from Canada and throughout the United States. Some have never been around agriculture. They want to learn more when they read our website about running a regenerative, profitable ranch with healthy soil and fish-friendly irrigation with Chinook salmon spawning on the ranch."

The Elzingas provide lodging and meals.

"Although the interns don't receive a salary, they benefit from us putting a horse under them, feeding them beef, and teaching them an agriculture of hope," Glenn said.

Along with supervising interns, the daughters divide up ranch duties, depending on their interests, although everyone chips in where they are needed.

Melanie crew bosses the range riding crew, manages and trains horses, handles social media, and is a graphic designer and photographer.

Abigail shoots videos and manages cattle using adaptive grazing methods. She and her husband, Ethan Kelly, also raise pastured pork on the ranch.

Linnaea is a riding crew boss, marketing manager, photographer, graphic designer, and author of their cooking blog, Meathacker.

Emily is the ranch information technology manager and does website coding and troubleshooting. She is studying computer science and physics at Idaho State University with a minor in biology.

Becky is a ranch hand, range rider, does irrigation and is studying art, music and biology at the University of Idaho.

Annie is a ranch hand, range crew boss, and is the quality control checker in the warehouse.

Maddy is a range crew boss, ranch hand, and raises sheep with her husband Wesley. She also processes order labels in the shipping warehouse, does odd jobs and helps with irrigation. Wesley also crew bosses on the range along with being a solid ranch hand.

The Elzingas began shipping their organic grass-fed beef in 2005. They use regenerative grazing methods, rotating cows away from riparian areas and watering them on troughs interspersed throughout the range.

On their 70-square mile summer range in the Salmon River Mountains, range riders live with the herd to protect them from wolves.

Glenn speaks at regenerative ag conferences and via podcasts, describing how they implement their holistic ranch practices and grazing techniques.

"Let's face it, Caryl and I will be transitioning out of agriculture at some point," he said. "I'm 62, and there will be a new generation who will be feeding people. Some of our daughters say they want to be that next generation. Some interns have earned ag degrees and others haven't. But they all learn wellness and the interconnectedness of soil, land management, and animal and human health." ■

Caryl Elzinga

Multi-talented ranch woman

By Heather Smith Thomas
For Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Caryl and Glenn Elzinga started their grass-fed beef production business from scratch. They came to eastern Idaho in 1987 soon after they were married and both had seasonal jobs with BLM.

They lived on a small ranch near Tendoy, 20 miles from Salmon, and began raising beef to sell direct to customers.

By 2004 they were selling the beef from 160 yearlings each year, directly to individuals and natural food stores, with a waiting list for their product.

"This program kept getting bigger, until we outgrew that little place and moved to a large ranch near May, Idaho," Caryl said.

Purchasing that ranch was a complex challenge, however, because there were many players involved—Idaho Fish and Game, National Marine Fisheries, The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Idaho Power.

"I insisted on reading the easement document before we signed off in it, and realized we needed to change a lot of things to make it work," she said. "Some people think we had this ranch given to us, but we are still paying on the mortgage, two decades later. The Nature Conservancy has been a great partner, however, and the easement does not preclude us from doing anything we want to do."

Caryl homeschooled all seven of their girls, and now helps with grandkids.

Four years ago, Caryl was diagnosed with chronic Lyme disease, and health issues make it harder to do the physical jobs.

"We have taken a relatively small operation and created a larger source of income that is sustainable for the whole family; we can keep our kids employed at a decent wage and also give other people jobs."

– Caryl Elzinga

Photo courtesy of Alderspring Ranch

Caryl Elzinga of Alderspring Ranch

"I still go out with Glenn to look at plants, and to figure out what we'll do next with the cattle management, but I haven't been on a horse for many years," she said. "I still run all the finances and a lot of models, trying to figure out how to make things better for our ranch. We don't have any outside money, so everything we do has to make a little money."

Up until three years ago, Caryl ran much of the beef shipping business but now has some help with that.

"I've become more involved with the actual marketing," she said. "We used to do it all through our website, and it's still there for orders, but we now rely more on social media to gain new customers."

Several of the girls are excellent photographers, and many of their photos are on the website and social media.

"We keep gaining new customers and they want to know about the beef, how it was raised, and about the family who raised it," Caryl said.

"We have taken a relatively small operation and created a larger source of income that is sustainable for the whole family; we can keep our kids employed at a decent wage and also give other people jobs," she said.

She said her goal has been to produce healthy beef on healthy rangelands and help educate people about the benefits of beef and the true value of properly managed rangelands. ■

Photo courtesy of Dane Elmquist

Dane Elmquist, left, a former University of Idaho graduate student, and his research team take soil samples for research on interactions between soil arthropod communities and crops.

Research finds benefits of soil arthropods for crops

By John O'Connell
University of Idaho

MOSCOW, Idaho – University of Idaho researchers studying farm fields in the Palouse region have unearthed strong evidence that increasing diversity in agricultural systems benefits soil arthropod communities, which in turn improves crop productivity.

Through their research, Dane Elmquist, who recently graduated from the University of Idaho with a doctorate in entomology, and his major professor, University Distinguished Professor Sanford Eigenbrode, provided baseline data of soil arthropod communities inhabiting Palouse farmland, as well as how farming practices influence those communities.

The data will allow researchers to monitor changes in Palouse soil arthropod populations over time and guide work aimed to improve overall health of agricultural soils.

Arthropods are invertebrates with jointed legs and bodies with a hard exoskeleton. About 23% of all described organisms live in soil, and 85% of those are arthropods.

Examples of soilborne arthropods include mites, springtails, centipedes, ants, spiders, beetles and pill bugs.

"These soil arthropods are kind of a neglected piece of the puzzle. They've received a lot less research attention compared with their microbial counterparts in the soil, as well as earthworms," said Elmquist, who earned his doctorate last December and is now working for University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension. "We really didn't know much, if anything, about

"I was surprised by the number and diversity of the arthropods we pulled from these agricultural ecosystems that have been farmed relatively intensively for the last 100 years."

– Dane Elmquist, University of Idaho graduate, entymology

the soil arthropod communities of the Palouse agricultural ecosystems prior to our project."

Soil arthropods are critical to soil health as they decompose crop residue, thereby releasing nutrients that support crop growth. They also interact closely with important soil microbial communities and help control soilborne pests.

Elmquist based his dissertation on the research. His project includes five chapters – three have been published in scientific journals and one chapter is under review for publication.

He and Eigenbrode have also published an Extension bulletin on their work through U of I.

The soil arthropod work was funded by three grants.

From 2018-2022, researchers planted on-farm strip trials and small plots to compare arthropod populations in conventional crop rotations with more diversified rotations, including winter pea in place of a legume or a fallow period, single-species cover crops and multi-species spring cover crops.

The diversified rotations, especially the addition of winter peas and multi-species cover crops, resulted in a far richer diversity of soil arthropods.

"We did find an effect of above-ground diversity on below-ground diversity," Elmquist said, adding the greater diversity of soil arthropods persisted into later planted winter wheat.

Furthermore, they confirmed an increase in arthropod-mediated litter decomposition in wheat plots that followed multi-species cover crops.

Through their combined studies, they evaluated more than 950 soil samples for arthropods, counting more than 120,000 individual arthropods and identifying more than 70 arthropod taxa.

"I was surprised by the number and diversity of the arthropods we pulled from these agricultural ecosystems that have been farmed relatively intensively for the last 100 years," Elmquist said.

He extracted arthropods from soil samples taken from experimental plots using a tool known as a Berlese-Tullgren funnel. A light bulb heats and dries the soil, forcing the arthropods further away until they fall from the mouth of a funnel into a preservative.

Elmquist also modified the funnel to capture them alive for use in greenhouse experiments.

After counting the arthropods and recording their family, Elmquist added them to soil in pots to grow wheat plants in a greenhouse. He discovered the presence of arthropods had a profound effect on strengthening wheat root systems and increasing above-ground plant biomass.

AdobeStock photo

"The roots were generally longer, there were more of them and they had more tips and branches, which are important for nutrient scavenging," Elmquist said, adding soil arthropods also increased the plant biomass above ground.

The researchers also noticed in their greenhouse research that when aphids were placed on plants, populations of arthropods in the soil became more robust. Conversely, arthropods in the soil correlated with more aphids on foliage.

More research is needed to understand the mechanisms behind the correlation between soil arthropods and insects feeding above ground, as well as the improved plant root development triggered by soil arthropods.

Eigenbrode and Elmquist collaborated with U of I's former head of the Department of Soil and Water Systems, Jodi Johnson-Maynard, to compare using the presence of soil arthropods as an indicator of soil health against more traditional methods of assessing soil health.

They see great promise in the approach, which warrants additional research.

"Soil arthropods affect the growth and potential profitability of wheat production in our region, and this is why producers should become aware of this work," Eigenbrode said. "Take care of your below-ground livestock. That's part of taking care of your whole production system, and we've provided some data that underscores that it's not just handwaving. It's real." ■

AdobeStock photo

Forest soils

Organic and mineral

By Chris Schnepf
University of Idaho

In conversations with loggers, I occasionally hear someone refer to whatever is under their skidder or caterpillar as "dirt." I usually refrain from suggesting they describe it as "soil" instead.

When I was a forestry undergraduate at Iowa State University, we had a locally legendary soils professor who took exception to the term "dirt."

Professor Scholtes would say, "OK, you knockers, dirt is misplaced soil – without dirt, you wouldn't have dirty clothes, without dirty clothes, you wouldn't have laundry detergent, without laundry detergent, you wouldn't have soap operas, without soap operas, you wouldn't have television – thus, does soil provide you with entertainment!"

When talking about roadbuilding, referring to cut or fill material as dirt is fine. That material is often not going to be growing much in the near future. However, referring to forest soils as dirt really misses a critical part of forest ecology and silviculture.

My first soils class was more chemistry and texture than biology. The inorganic, mineral dimensions of a soil (sand, silt, and clay, nutrient levels, etc.) continue to be very important.

But in the last 50 years, the organic components of soils have gained progressively more attention in forestry and increasingly in agriculture.

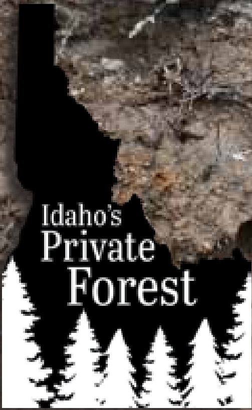
(Chris Schnepf is an area extension educator in forestry for the University of Idaho in Bonner, Boundary, Kootenai and Benewah counties. He can be reached at cschnepf@uidaho.edu.)

Unlike soils in which annual crops are grown, forest soils are not typically tilled. Generally, we try to keep the existing forest soil profile intact with minimal disturbance or compaction.

Typically, this is done by reducing the area covered in roads and skid trails, using least compacting logging methods (e.g., line skidding on steep slopes), and logging when soils are dry or frozen.

There are some exceptions. For example, some light surface soil disturbance may aid natural regeneration of tree seedlings, all of which germinate best on bare mineral soil surfaces.

In part because they are not tilled, dead organic materials



LEFT: **Organic materials are a critical dimension of forest soils.**
Photos by Chris Schnepf

on and in the soil are especially important for forests. For example, coarse woody debris provides wildlife habitat on the soil surface.

As wood decays and is assimilated to the soil profile, it reduces soil density and aids moisture retention. Fine organic debris (less than 3 inches in diameter) also benefits forest soils (within acceptable fire risks), particularly with nutrients when this material is green.

We continue to learn more about dead organic materials in soil. For example, there is growing amount of research supporting the value of adding biochar to enrich forest soil organic material.

Living organic organisms are also very important in forest soils. Fungi and animals including worms, insects, arthropods, and mammals, play important roles in breaking down coarse woody organic materials, recycling nutrients, aerating the soil, and many other functions.

Mycorrhizal fungi, a type of fungi that form symbiotic relationships with most of the plants on earth, are especially important in forests. Recent books ("The Overstory") and movies ("Avatar") have popularized the connectedness between trees, but foresters have been aware of mycorrhizal fungi connecting trees for over 150 years (see https://doi.org/10.1111/nph.15397).

That is part of the reason we recommend recruiting coarse woody debris to forest soils. As it decays, it increases soil moisture, which aids mycorrhizal fungi.

In addition to connecting trees, mycorrhizae help extend tree root systems, helping trees access more moisture and nutrients and block pathogenic fungi. Some nurseries actually inoculate tree seedlings with mycorrhizae at the nursery if they are likely to be planted in a farm field or old mining site, but this is not usually needed on forest sites.

Physical soil properties are still important. To learn more about those soil characteristics on your property, start with the Soil Survey, managed by the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, with support from land grant universities and other organizations.

We used to pack heavy boxes of county paper soil survey booklets to extension programs to help people learn about soils on their property. Now we use the web soil survey (https://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/).

Logging when soils are frozen can help reduce soil impacts.

One advantage of the web soil survey most people note right away is relatively current aerial imagery. Many of the aerial photos on paper soil surveys were over 50 years old. In 50 years, a field may become a fully stocked relatively mature forest!

More importantly, there is much more useful forestry information in the web soil survey than in the old paper surveys. For a given site you can get information on soil suitability for tree planting, log landings, natural surface roads (pretty critical in forestry), and many other properties.

The soil survey also contains information on soil hazards such as vulnerability to soil erosion, compaction, fire damage, and tree windthrow.

The web soil survey is fairly easy to use. You can see a tutorial at https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/natural-resource-concerns/soils/getting-started-with-web-soil-survey.

There are also some good online video orientations to using the web soil survey. The soil survey involves a lot of data, so if your internet is slow, you may want to take a laptop to a place with good broadband internet availability or use public library computers to access it.

If you are using the soil survey to make forestry decisions, be sure to check your soil survey findings on site, to make sure what you are working with matches the soil description. The survey will likely describe "inclusions" of different types of soils that are different than the mapping unit description.

Inclusions are often more common in forest soils than they are in agricultural soils, as forest soils vary more in topography.

You should also assess the organic material recruitment on your site. We have an extension publication that will help you measure that titled "Managing Organic Debris for Forest Health" (PNW 609, available at https://www.uidaho.edu/extension/publications/publication-detail?id=pnw0609).

The publication also goes into great detail on the functions of organic materials in forest soils.

Understanding your forest soils is critical to making forest management decisions that fulfill your forest management goals.

In addition to the resources mentioned prior in this column, Washington State University has an excellent extension publication on forest soils, titled "Keeping Your Forest Soils Healthy and Productive" (WSU EB2019, available https://pubs.extension.wsu.edu/keeping-your-forest-soils-healthy-and-productive). ■

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https://idahopreferred.com/members/cherry-hill-farms/

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Visit: www.idahopreferred.com/find/retail

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Idaho State Department of Agriculture

Idaho State Department of Agriculture photos

Japanese beetles like the one shown here can damage a wide variety of crops.

Ag department targets Japanese beetles, again

By Sean Ellis
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

CALDWELL – The Idaho State Department of Agriculture is again conducting a full-court press against the Japanese beetle, an invasive pest that attacks a wide variety of crops.

The beetle is a highly destructive plant pest that feeds on more than 300 different agricultural and ornamental plants.

Agriculture is a major part of Idaho's economy, and, according to a recent University of Idaho study, accounts for one in every nine jobs in the state, 17% of total sales and 13% of total gross state product.

The Japanese beetle threatens to take a bite out of that economic impact if it ever gains a significant foothold in Idaho.

The ISDA is currently conducting a major eradication effort of the beetle in the Caldwell area. If left unchecked, the pest could cause large negative impacts to many Idaho ag commodities that are grown around that area.

Canyon County has the most farms in the state – 2,113 – and ranks No. 5 in total farm revenue among Idaho's 44 counties.

The county is also one of the top seed producing areas in the world and the center of Idaho's $500 million seed industry.

The bad news is that the pest has been found adjacent to farmland in Caldwell. The good news is that so far, the ISDA's eradication effort appears to be working.

“These invasive species increase our costs as growers…so it’s better to stop it ahead of time.”

– Mike Williamson, manager of Williamson Orchards and Vineyards

And the ag department does have a good track record when it comes to eradicating this plant pest.

After dozens of Japanese beetles were detected in Boise in 2012, the ISDA undertook a major eradication effort that resulted in the pest not being detected in Boise the past several years.

It was the largest documented Japanese beetle eradication in U.S. history, according to Andrea Thompson, section manager of ISDA’s plant industries division.

The ag department first identified the Caldwell infestation in 2021.

After feeding on grass in residential areas during the winter months, the beetle comes out and it “wants to eat everything else and that’s where it becomes a problem for agricultural production,” Thompson said.

The department treated about 1,065 properties on 310 acres of turf in 2023 and this year plans to increase the amount of treatments.

Adult Japanese beetles are about a half-inch long and have metallic green bodies and coppery wing covers.

Adult beetles can leave holes in plants and skeletonize leaves.

The number of beetles detected in the Boise infestation exploded from 56 in year one to more than 3,000 in year two.

So far, ag department officials have not detected those types of numbers in Caldwell.

“We haven't seen that rate of explosion in Caldwell, so we feel like the treatment is working and that eradication is within reach,” Thompson said. “We feel very confident in our ability to knock this thing out.”

She said the ISDA takes this eradication effort extremely seriously and wants to keep the pest from becoming a major issue for Idaho farmers.

If the pest did gain a foothold in Idaho, it could impact farmers’ ability to export commodities and quarantine restrictions could be placed on the movement of some Idaho crops.

Thompson said the state’s agricultural industry has been very supportive of the eradication effort, and residents of Caldwell have also been very helpful.

The beetle, native to Japan, was first detected in the U.S. in 1916 and is now found in most states east of the Mississippi River.

Idaho does have preventative controls designed to stop the introduction of Japanese beetles into Idaho from infested states in the East.

Thompson said that in other areas of the country where the beetle is found in high numbers, growers’ only option is weekly chemical treatments during the growing season to minimize damage.

Mike Williamson, manager of Williamson Orchards and Vineyards in Caldwell, said he applauds the ag department’s effort to get rid of the beetle before it establishes itself here.

He said any invasive species is a concern “because there are no natural predators or natural control methods to get them under control.”

“These invasive species increase our costs as growers…so it’s better to stop it ahead of time,” he said.

ISDA officials suspect the invasive pest hitchhikes to Idaho, mainly on nursery stock brought in by newcomers moving to the state.

Rules are in place to try to prevent that from happening but they still pop up in Idaho from time to time.

Idaho has been trapping for the beetles since 1991.

For more information about the pest, contact Thompson at (208) 332-8620 or by email at Andrea.Thompson@isda.idaho.gov. ■

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Country Chuckles

By Jonny Hawkins

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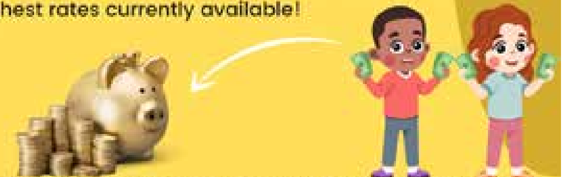

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Photo by Steve Stuebner

Boating activity was heavy on a Thursday afternoon on Bear Lake.

Idaho water board explores ways to increase water supply in the Bear River Basin

Idaho Department of Water Resources news release

SODA SPRINGS — The Idaho Water Resource Board (board) toured the Bear River Basin and Bear Lake in late July and discussed ways to increase water supply in the region.

One potential option is to increase water storage in Bear Lake and another is to explore cloud seeding to augment the high-elevation snowpack, board officials said.

The board held its regular bi-monthly meeting in Soda Springs July 25-26 to discuss those topics and other water management activities that involve neighboring states, multiple water user groups and partner agencies in the Bear River Basin.

The Bear River yields about 800,000 acre-feet of water per year, on average, to the Great Salt Lake, while Bear Lake stores about 1.4 million acre-feet at full pool, said Matt Anders, bureau

chief of technical services for the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR).

The Bear River crosses state lines five times in its 350-mile course, Anders noted. From the headwaters in the Uinta Mountains in Utah, the river flows through a corner of southwest Wyoming, then makes a big U-shaped course through the corner of southeast Idaho, before it flows back into Utah and drains into the Great Salt Lake.

A three-state compact defines how water is allocated to the three states. (see map).

The Bear River supports irrigation, hydropower, native fish and recreation. It is popular with boaters and beach goers from Utah, with the city of Logan (population 55,000) 35 miles away.

It's also a popular getaway for Idaho residents in this rural corner of the state. The Bear River is the largest tributary of the Great Salt Lake, which has been reeling from low lake levels in recent years, Utah officials said.

The board is exploring the possibility of adding storage to Bear Lake to provide more water for irrigation and other uses.

The board filed for a water right in Bear Lake for that purpose, but the channel capacity of the Bear River would need to be increased from 1,500 cubic feet per second (cfs) to 2,600 cfs to make that possible, Anders said.

Flood easements would need to be negotiated with landowners along the river in the Gentile Valley for that to occur. Efforts to obtain the necessary easements are ongoing.

The board is also exploring whether cloud seeding in the Bear River Basin could provide a benefit to Idaho water users. A board-funded feasibility and design study was completed by the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) in 2023 to assess whether cloud seeding could increase water supply in the basin.

The study found that there are opportunities to cloud seed with both ground generators and aircraft. There also is potential to share infrastructure for cloud seeding in the Upper Snake region with the state of Utah, said Kala Golden, cloud seeding program manager for IDWR.

The development of comprehensive ground and aircraft operations has been shown to be the most effective way to enhance water supply with cloud seeding, Golden said. However, there is a need to collect real operational data and then assess whether cloud seeding will support long-term water supply enhancement goals.

"There are a number of studies out there that indicate a well-managed and scientifically based cloud seeding project can increase winter precipitation on average about 10 percent," Golden said. "NCAR has found there to be good opportunities for seeding in the basin, so I think it's reasonable to assume we could see similar output from what NCAR has proposed."

The state of Utah is also actively working to grow operations in the basin by adding 10 remote ground generators in Idaho to benefit flows into the Great Salt Lake, officials said.

"This is a project that's near and dear to my heart," said Marc Gibbs, an Idaho Water Resource Board member who farms in the Grace area in the Bear River Basin. "I think this is an opportunity that we need to pursue."

Photo by Sean Ellis

The Idaho Water Resource Board toured the Bear River Basin and Bear Lake in late July and discussed ways to increase water supply in the region.

Bear River Basin Adjudication

IDWR staff also provided an update on the Bear River Basin Adjudication (BRBA), which started in July 2021. The BRBA includes both surface and groundwater rights in the portions of Bannock, Bear Lake, Caribou, Cassia, Franklin, Oneida, and Power Counties within the Bear River Basin.

This includes IDWR Administrative Basins 11, 13, 15, and 17. The purpose of the water rights adjudication is to determine the nature, extent and priority of surface and ground water rights to allow for effective management of the resource.

There are an estimated 3,745 active water rights in the area; about 2,865 claims have been filed through the adjudication so far. Claims evaluations in Basins 11 and 13 are expected to be complete in 2031.

Adjudication activities for IDWR Administrative Basins 15 and 17 are scheduled for 2031 – 2034. ■

Classifieds

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New tractor tires. 3) Uniroyal tubeless 6.40-15SL 4 Ply $50 ea. 4) Dyna-Trac STA 9.00-10NHS tubetype $75 ea. $400 all. 1959 Minneapolis Moline tractor. Power steering, 2 new front tires and back a lot of tread. New seat, ignition switch. 3-point hitch w/pto and live hydraulics. 5 speed w/ shuttle gear. $3000 OBO. Pine,ID 208-653-2125

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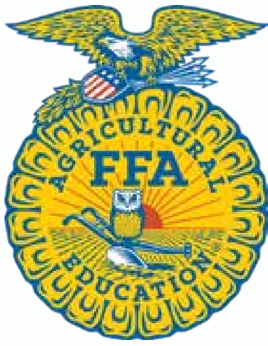

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DIRT ROAD DISCUSSIONS

Episode 64: Discover Ag

When people hear about agriculture in the news headlines, a new trend is to find a podcast to break it down and give new insights and commentary. This is where Discover Ag Podcast hosts Tara Vander Dussen (known as the New Mexico Milk Maid, 5th-generation dairy farmer) and Natalie Kovarik (4th-generation cattle rancher from Nebraska) come into play. They talk about what it is like to be a woman in agriculture today while producing a top-ranked podcast that follows the weekly development of agriculture in the media.