

Idaho ag export value down 25 percent

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — The stronger U.S. dollar has had a significant impact on Idaho agricultural export value, which lags last year's record pace by a wide margin.

Exports of Idaho farm products totaled \$600 million through the first nine months of 2015, down 24.7 percent from \$796 million during the same period last year.

The strengthening U.S. dollar relative to other currencies was a major factor in that decline, as were lower commodity prices, said Laura Johnson, who administers the Idaho State Department of Agriculture's market development division.

The West Coast port slowdown also played a role in the



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Potato plants bloom in a Southwestern Idaho field in June. The value of Idaho ag exports is down 25 percent through the third quarter compared with the same period last year.

drop, she added, because "we had customers that went elsewhere during that time and

we're still trying to get some of them back."

Whether U.S. and Idaho ag

exports continue to decrease will have a "lot to do with what happens with the dollar," said Doug Robison, Northwest Farm Credit Service's vice president of agriculture for Western Idaho.

The state's ag export decrease follows four straight years of ag export records for the state. This year's third-quarter total is slightly ahead of the \$594 million total in 2011, the year the record streak began.

The decrease was led by a 41.5 percent drop in dairy exports, which account for almost a third of the state's total ag export value. Idaho exports of dairy products totaled \$168 million through the third quarter of 2015, down from \$288 million in 2014.

Idaho's drop in dairy export value was a combination of less volume and much lower

prices, Johnson said.

China and Russia together imported 18 million tons of dairy products in 2014 but only 10 million tons so far in 2015, Robison said.

"That represents 10 to 11 percent of the worldwide dairy export market and all that has to find a home," he said. "That's had a big impact on prices globally."

Idaho exports under the "miscellaneous grain and seed" category are down 13 percent (\$89 million) this year, vegetable exports are off 14 percent (\$87 million) and exports of preserved food are down 9 percent (\$65 million).

The export of live animals from Idaho is up 195 percent to \$7 million.

The totals are based on quarterly Census Bureau trade data broken down for ISDA by

Global Trade Information Services.

Mexico has surpassed Canada this year as the top destination for Idaho farm products.

Idaho farm product sales to Mexico totaled \$137 million through September, down 6 percent from 2014. But Idaho ag exports to Canada were down 21 percent to \$125 million.

Exports of Idaho malt to Mexico totaled \$51 million, up 5 percent from 2014, and miscellaneous grain and seed and vegetable sales were also up, but preserved food exports declined 23 percent to \$28 million.

Idaho ag exports to South Korea dropped 38 percent (\$49 million) and they were down 16 percent (\$44 million) to China and 39 percent (\$29 million) to Japan.

Waiting for El Nino: Impact yet to be felt

Recent storms reflect typical weather patterns, forecasters say

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Forecasters still expect a historically strong El Nino to pelt California with weather systems this winter — and still anticipate the atmospheric phenomenon will be gone by next summer.

This winter's El Nino — marked by higher-than-normal equatorial sea surface temperatures and robust Southern storms — is still expected to rank among the top three strongest episodes dating back to 1950, the federal Climate Prediction Center reports.

A typical El Nino weather pattern is expected to kick in after New Year's Day, but the pattern will likely recede back to neutral sea-surface and atmospheric conditions by late spring or early summer, the agency said.

"El Nino can dissipate that quickly," National Weather Service warning coordinator Michelle Mead told the Capital Press in an email. She said El Nino episodes typically last from nine to 12 months.

"They often begin to form during June-August, reach peak strength during December-April, and then decay during May-July of the next year," Mead said. "However, some prolonged episodes have

lasted two years and even as long as three or four years."

On average, El Nino and La Nina — an opposite phenomenon in which storms come in from the north — each occur every three to five years, she said.

Winter is already off to a fast start in many areas of California, albeit not because of El Nino. A northern polar jet stream has pushed storms through the region at regular intervals — about two a week — for the past month.

As a result, Fresno had recorded 2.87 inches of rain for the season as of Dec. 14, above its normal 2.31 inches, and Modesto's 3.13 inches of precipitation are above the seasonal average of 2.78 inches, according to the National Weather Service.

However, Sacramento and much of Northern California are still behind their normal seasonal totals.

The storms have been a typical fall pattern rather than a sign of El Nino, Mead said.

"It just feels abnormal since we've been so dry the last several years," she said.

Warming sea-surface temperatures in the equatorial Pacific Ocean nearly match those in the fall of 1997 and exceed those in 1972 and 1982, all big rainfall years, the Climate Pre-

diction Center notes.

Water experts have said California would need more than one wet and snowy winter to emerge from its historic drought. While California's last El Nino in the winter of 2009-2010 interrupted a three-year drought, the dry conditions returned in 2012 as sea surface temperatures across the equatorial Pacific remained mostly average.

The U.S. Drought Monitor still shows the entire state to be in a drought, with most of the Central Valley and part of the Central Coast in an exceptional drought.



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Cattle graze in the rain near Redding, Calif., on Dec. 9. Strong El Nino conditions are expected to bring above-average precipitation to many areas of California through the winter.



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Paul Wenger, president of the California Farm Bureau Federation, talks to growers at a Red Bluff dinner in 2012. He was re-elected to a fourth two-year term Dec. 8.

Wenger elected to fourth term as California Farm Bureau president

RENO, Nev. — Delegates to the California Farm Bureau Federation's 97th annual meeting have re-elected Modesto farmer Paul Wenger to serve a fourth two-year term as president.

Wenger, the organization's 15th president overall, has been a statewide officer in the CFBF since 1997, when he was elected second vice president. He became first vice president in 2005 and president in 2009.

"I'm proud of the fact that Farm Bureau today is a respected agricultural organization because of the leadership shown by the CFBF board and by county Farm Bureaus," Wenger said in prepared remarks. "We have to continue to fight and lead the way."

Delegates elected two new vice presidents — Jamie Johansson of Oroville as first vice president and Tony Toso of Hormitos as second vice president.

Seven new members were elected to the CFBF Board of Directors and will represent their regions. They are: Ronnie Leimgruber of Holtville, Tom Rogers of Madera, Joe Martinez of Winters, Susan Hook of Penn Valley, Dominic Carinalli of Sebastopol, Willie Dow of Susanville and Blake Alexander of Crescent City.

Tyler Blagg of Lodi will chair the statewide Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee and will serve as an advisory member of the CFBF board.

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