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Idaho

Food Producers of Idaho to end the Ag Pavilion

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — Food Producers of Idaho has announced it is ending a long-standing program involving agricultural organizations that cooperatively staff educational booths at two Idaho fairs.

Rick Waitley, executive director of Food Producers, said the program, called the Agricultural Pavilion, has been a "tremendous success" since its inception 22 years ago at the Western Idaho Fair in Boise, but the organization wants to invest its resources in new areas.

Members made the decision to end the program during a Sept. 28 meeting and subsequently sent out letters alerting groups that participated in the Ag Pavilion of the decision.

"We're looking for other opportunities — several things that might be good things for us to look at," Waitley said, adding the organization might participate in four or five smaller venues.

Agricultural groups that participate in Food Producers meet regularly during the legislative session, and less frequently during the rest of the year, to discuss issues of importance to their industry.

The Ag Pavilion includes several booths from agricultural groups — 51 groups had booths in the most recent pavilion — in a common area focused on educating visitors about Idaho agriculture. It also includes games and activities for children.

The second pavilion initially alternated between the Twin Falls County Fair and



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Tom and Terry Riemenapp learn about farming and Idaho agriculture Aug. 23 in the Agriculture Pavilion at the Western Idaho Fair in Boise. Food Producers of Idaho recently decided to discontinue hosting the Agricultural Pavilion.

the Eastern Idaho State Fair in Blackfoot but pulled out of Eastern Idaho. It has remained a fixture for the past decade in Twin Falls, where Farm Bureau and Food Pro-

ducers financed construction of a permanent building to host it.

"We feel the investment we've made in these two fairs has been very valuable,"

Waitley said. "At the same time, because of the investment we've made, we maybe haven't explored some other things."

John Pitz, manager of the Twin Falls County Fair, vowed to maintain an agricultural theme in the building where the pavilion has been hosted.

"I can work with Farm Bureau and figure out what to put in there that would be ag-related," Pitz said.

Waitley estimated the annual cost of organizing the Ag Pavilion at \$30,000, but said Food Producers netted a nearly \$10,000 average profit, after accounting for individual booth fees and other revenue, such as sales from a country store in the pavilion. The pavilion's profits have enabled Food Producers to hold the

line on dues, Waitley said.

However, Wyatt Prescott, president of Food Producers and former executive vice president with Idaho Cattle Association, said it was getting tougher to find volunteers to staff the Ag Pavilion, which required a lot of work to host.

"I don't think anybody was thrilled about being done with it," Prescott said.

Prescott anticipates Food Producers will now increase its focus on educating state policymakers about agricultural issues.

Mark Duffin, executive director of Idaho Sugarbeet Growers Association and co-chairman of Food Producers' subcommittee governing Ag Pavilion, added, "Sometimes it's good to change and take a new approach to reach some new people."

South Dakota woman granted wish to attend Idaho sheep festival

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

The annual Trailing of the Sheep Festival draws thousands of people from all over the world to Idaho's Wood River Valley each October. This year, it drew one very special guest — 20-year-old Shelby Huff, who was given full VIP treatment during the five-day festival through the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Huff, of Hill City, S.D., was granted a wish because of complications from aplastic anemia, a rare and serious bone marrow disorder. She was diagnosed with the condition in November 2012 and spent the next two and a half years in and out of hospitals enduring invasive treatments and painful and life-threatening complications.

She says she's healed now, graduated from high school in May and is attending Western Dakota Technical Institute in the pursuit of becoming a registered nurse.

It took time to get around to her "wish" and she could have chosen to go anywhere and do anything.

"Ultimately, Trailing of the Sheep was my wish," she said



Courtesy of Trailing of Sheep Festival

Shelby Huff (fourth from left) poses with her mother, sister and grandparents in the hills outside Ketchum near the band of sheep that would take center stage in the Trailing of the Sheep parade.

during a phone interview after her Idaho adventure.

The festival, marking its 20th anniversary this year, celebrates the rich history and culture of sheep ranching in the Wood River Valley. Huff is not connected to ranching but loves sheep and says they are "super duper cute and adorable."

Her mother, sister and grandparents shared in her wish trip, which began with

a surprise reception at the Boise airport, complete with balloons, banners and Basque dancers.

"It was so cool," she said, although it took a while to register.

Then it was "oh my gosh, they're all here for me. Oh my gosh this is such an amazing greeting," she said.

But that was just the beginning. Huff and her family had another reception at sheep fes-

tival headquarters in Ketchum and were then settled in at a "super nice" upscale condo, which would serve as their home base.

The VIP treatment continued throughout the festival, where Huff and the family participated with a trainer in the sheepdog trials, attended the folklife fair and fiber-arts classes, lamb tastings, the Sheep Tales Gathering, Shepherd's Ball and the



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

The Trailing of the Sheep Festival in downtown Ketchum, Idaho, is seen in this 2015 photo. The Make-a-Wish Foundation this year granted 20-year-old Shelby Huff a wish, making her a VIP guest at this year's festival.

Trailing of the Sheep parade. The family was also treated to fly fishing and horseback riding by local outfitters.

"It was great. I loved the scenery, the culture, the history, the dancing. It was just an amazing trip," she said.

The Idaho chapter of Make-A-Wish contacted festival officials in the spring to get the ball rolling, said Laura Musbach Drake, festival executive director.

"We were really thrilled to give her an experience like this," she said.

Huff is a "darling," and she and her family were gracious and grateful, she said.

"I know they had a great time, and we were sure honored to have them here," she said.

Adding to the VIP experience, the governor proclaimed Oct. 8 "Shelby Huff Day" — a "super-cool" proclamation, Huff said.

"The people there are amazing and so sweet, and I really appreciate what they did for me and my family," she said.

Farm commodity price drop impacts Idaho GDP

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Agriculture led Idaho's gains in gross domestic product for several years, but that has changed as commodity prices — particularly dairy — have dropped.

Idaho's gross domestic product declined 0.2 percent during the first quarter of 2016 compared with the fourth quarter of 2015, according to data recently released by the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Leading that decline was agriculture, which had driven the state's large GDP gains in recent years and helped carry Idaho's economy out of the last recession.

Total GDP from the state's agricultural sector was a seasonally adjusted \$3.07 billion during the first quarter of 2016, down 12 percent from

\$3.5 billion in the fourth quarter of 2015.

Compared with the first quarter of 2015, Idaho farm GDP was down 17 percent during the first quarter of this year.

"Leading the charge downward was ... a weak ag economy," said University of Idaho Agricultural Economist Garth Taylor. "It's a reversal from what's been happening."

Idaho farm GDP increased from \$3.6 billion in 2014 to \$4 billion in 2013 and then \$4.25 billion in 2014. But a reversal began last year.

Total Idaho farm GDP fell from \$4.25 billion in 2014 to \$3.7 billion in 2015, a 13 percent drop. During that same period, total Idaho GDP increased from \$63 billion to \$65 billion.

When it comes to personal income, the decline is more pronounced. Personal income

from Idaho's farm sector totaled \$1.8 billion during the second quarter of 2016, down 22 percent from \$2.3 billion during the second quarter of 2015.

Farm proprietor income in Idaho totaled \$1.14 billion during the second quarter of 2016, down 31 percent from \$1.66 billion during the same period in 2015, according to BEA.

The decreases are reflected in cash receipts for the state's top farm commodities. Six of Idaho's top seven farm commodities suffered declines in cash receipts in 2015 compared with 2014, according to USDA's Economic Research Service.

Idaho farm cash receipts totaled \$7.5 billion in 2015, according to ERS data, down 15 percent from \$8.8 billion in 2014.

Cash receipts for dairy, Idaho's top farm commodity in terms of revenue, fell from \$3.2 billion in 2014 to \$2.4 billion in 2015, while revenue from cattle and calves declined from \$2 billion to \$1.95 billion.

On the crop side, potato cash receipts declined from \$919 million to \$872 million, wheat receipts declined from \$647 million to \$464 million, hay fell from \$551 million to \$440 million and barley was down from \$295 million to \$262 million.

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