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Courtesy College of Agricultural and Life Sciences

Michael Parrella, dean of University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, is introduced to Idaho ag industry leaders last February during a Food Producers of Idaho meeting. Parrella has aggressive plans for CALS, including major renovations at each of the college's nine ag research and extension stations.

## Idaho ag dean is pushing aggressive plan for college

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

MOSCOW, Idaho — Michael Parrella, dean of the University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, is pushing an aggressive plan to increase enrollment, renovate agricultural experiment stations and expand the college's research capacity.

Parrella told Capital Press he's moving quickly.

"I don't want to waste any time here," said Parrella, who took over as CALS dean last February. "We're doing it now."

Parrella said his goals are part of a larger plan by the UI president and provost to move the whole university forward.

They include major facility upgrades at CALS' nine agricultural and extension research stations across Idaho. Some of those facilities are approaching 60 years old.

"You don't need a brand new lab to do Nobel prize winning work but at the same time, we are trying to attract (new) scientists," Parrella said. "It would be nice to give them a

modern, functional laboratory."

"We're talking major upgrades and we're putting that plan together now," he said.

Those upgrades will require millions of dollars to implement and Parrella said the funding will require partnerships between CALS, the Idaho Legislature and ag industry.

The college also plans to expand and modernize graduate student housing at those ag research stations and has asked the legislature this year for \$1 million to help accomplish that.

Creating more and new grad student housing "is quite critical to better utilize the research capacity we have at those research and extension centers," said Mark McGuire, director of UI's Agricultural Experiment Station, which oversees the ag research stations.

CALS also plans to increase the college's enrollment of 948 by 20 percent.

Achieving that goal will include reaching students before they make their decision on which career to pursue as well as targeting FFA students

who don't have a farming background, Parrella said.

CALS is undergoing a partial reorganization that includes the formation of separate plant sciences, soil and water systems, and entomology, plant pathology and nematology departments.

That reorganization will include developing "some exciting new majors that will be of greater attraction to high school students," Parrella said.

Idaho Barley Commission Administrator Kelly Olson said the state's farming industry is excited by the vision and energy Parrella has brought to the job.

She said the state's ag industry must be ready to speak with legislators in support of CALS' plans and come up with some of the necessary funding in some cases.

"There is enthusiasm and confidence among industry that this guy will get the job done," she said. "I'm all on board and I hope other people will be on board as well (because) the heavy lifting is yet to come."

Olson said CALS' plan to increase enrollment could benefit all of agriculture because a lot of agribusiness jobs are difficult to fill due to a lack of skilled workers.

"That trained work force is a ... big need for us," she said.

## CALS asks legislature for \$1.85 million infusion

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

BOISE — The fiscal year 2018 budget request for University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences seeks a one-time infusion of \$1.85 million in state funding for major lab renovations and new graduate student housing at some of the college's research stations.

Gov. Butch Otter's proposed budget recommends funding the request but opts to spread the money over three years.

CALS is seeking \$1 million for new graduate student housing at four of its nine research and extension centers, including the Kimberly, Parma, Aberdeen and Nancy M. Cummings research centers.

The college has also asked for \$500,000 for lab renovations at the Kimberly and Parma research centers, and \$351,000 to purchase new farm equipment that will be used to conduct agricultural research.

The budget recommended by Otter, a Republican rancher, includes the \$351,000 for new equipment as well as \$500,000 of the remaining \$1.5 million that CALS is seeking in fiscal 2018.

Otter recommends spreading the remaining \$1 million over the following two fiscal years.

CALS' officials said they were happy with the governor's recommendation.

"We are very pleased with the governor's support



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Tom Elias, a research assistant at University of Idaho's Parma research station, conducts tests in the station's laboratory last September. UI's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences is seeking an additional \$1.85 million for new graduate student housing and major lab renovations at some of its nine agricultural research and extension centers.

of what we asked for," said CALS Chief Financial Officer Christian Elsberry.

Mark McGuire, director of UI's Agricultural Experiment Station, which oversees the college's nine ag research centers, said the existing graduate student housing at the centers is modest and 55-60 years old.

The new housing will save on expenses because graduate students won't have to rent off-station housing and the modern accommodations will also help CALS recruit additional grad students, he said.

"Our facilities at field stations to accommodate grad students is minimal and in some places it's non-existent," said CALS Dean Michael Parrella. "We have to do a better job accommodating them at the field stations."

The Aberdeen center conducts research on potatoes, wheat and barley, the Kimberly center focuses on projects related to dry beans, potatoes, irrigation and water resources, and the Parma center focuses on cereals, forages, vegetables, fruit, seed and other specialty crops produced in southwestern Idaho.

## Legislative committee agenda change shows lawmakers' regard for agriculture

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

BOISE — A major change in a legislative committee's agenda demonstrates the high regard Idaho lawmakers have for the state's farming sector.

The Legislature's Joint Legislative Economic Outlook and Revenue Assessment Committee meets annually the week before the state's

legislative session convenes.

Economists and leaders of many of the state's top economic sectors, including construction, retail, logging, agriculture, banking and automotive, brief committee members on how their sectors are performing.

Legislators use their estimates to help them forecast how much revenue the state will take in during the fiscal year and that revenue estimate is used as a guide during the session to set state budgets.

The committee's agenda was reduced from two days to one this year, and most of the economic sectors that have traditionally been on the agenda were dropped.

The lone private sector survivors: Agriculture and credit unions.

Keith Bybee, a state budget analyst and committee agenda organizer, said the committee's co-chairs wanted to streamline the meeting and get to the basics.

"They wanted to hear from the pushers and pullers of our economy; what is really driving the economy and how does that relate to general fund revenues," he said. "There is no doubt ag plays a huge roll still in Idaho's economy."

A large chunk of the state's gross domestic product "comes from agriculture and we thought it was real important to hear" from that sector, said Rep. Marc Gibbs, a com-

mittee co-chairman and Republican farmer from Grace.

University of Idaho Agricultural Economist Garth Taylor was picked to brief the committee on the state's farming sector. During his Jan. 5 presentation, he used several facts to show how critical farming is to Idaho.

Idaho ranks fourth in the nation when it comes to how much of a state's total gross domestic product is related to agriculture, Taylor said.

Although total farm cash receipts declined 4 percent in 2016, he said, Idaho agriculture is far out-performing the U.S. overall since 1980 when it comes to cash receipts in inflation-adjusted dollars.

From 1980 to 2015, Idaho farm cash receipts increased 44 percent in real dollars while U.S. farm cash receipts rose 6 percent, Taylor said.

Even though cash receipts and net farm income in declined in 2016, the state's farming sector will continue to act as a stabilizing influence on the economy because farmers still have to purchase inputs to grow their crops and raise their livestock, he said.

"All the costs of production remain the same, even when prices are down," he said. "Regardless of whether the price of milk is \$20 or \$12 (per hundredweight), you still have to feed your cow hay and it still has to be milked."

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