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Courtesy of Idaho Department of Environmental Quality
A farmer burns his field after harvest to clear it of pests and disease. The Idaho Senate is taking up the issue during this year's legislative session.

Senate committee votes to introduce field burning bill

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — A state Senate committee voted unanimously to print a bill that would amend Idaho's field burning program, a move aimed at avoiding a large reduction in the number of allowable burn days for farmers.

The changes, proposed by the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, are strongly supported by farm groups but adamantly opposed by several environmental groups and public health advocates.

People on both sides of the issue were at a Jan. 17 committee hearing where the bill was introduced but they didn't testify, which is normal for a print hearing.

But both sides expect a lot of debate during the public hearing on Senate Bill 1009, which hasn't yet been scheduled.

"We're glad they printed the bill today and we'll be there to support it as it goes through the process," said Stacey Katseanes-Satterlee, executive director of the Idaho Grain Producers Association.

She said plenty of growers will show up for the public hearing to support the legislation.

DEQ can only approve a field burning request if ozone and small particulate matter levels aren't expected to exceed 75 percent of the national standard.

But the federal ozone standard has been tightened and, unless Idaho's program is changed, that would result in the number of allowable burn days for Idaho farmers being reduced by a third to half, according to DEQ officials.

DEQ has proposed loosening Idaho's ozone standard, to 90 percent of the federal standard, to avoid that.

Tiffany Floyd, who manages DEQ's air quality division, told members of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee that the goal of the state's crop residue burning program is to protect public health while allowing farmers to continue to use field burning as a tool.

"DEQ believes the (change) will meet both of these goals," she said.

But environmental groups and public health advocates blasted the proposed loosening of the ozone standard in public comments and accused DEQ of ignoring science and caving in to the agricultural industry.

Those groups pushed for tightening the state's small particulate matter standard to offset the loosening of the ozone standard, an idea DEQ rejected.

A joint letter from the groups said the change "is irresponsibly endangering people's health."

According to DEQ data, Idaho farmers burn about 45,000 acres a year. Producers use field burning to eradicate and prevent pests and diseases, maintain yields and decrease their use of chemicals and diesel fuel.

Katseanes-Satterlee said it would be a huge hit to grain producers if there was a large reduction in allowable burn days.

"Having field burning as a tool for grain producers is important," she said. "The process (DEQ has) been through has been thorough and it's science-based and we support it. We'll be ready for the hearing."

Idaho Commission seeks to change how winery assessment is calculated

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — The Idaho Wine Commission is asking lawmakers to approve a change in how the state's wine assessment is calculated, a move designed to simplify record-keeping for wineries.

The assessments paid by wineries and wine grape producers are currently calculated differently but the rule proposed by the wine commission seeks to put them on the same page, IWC Legislative Educator Roger Batt told lawmakers Jan. 17.

"It will provide more consistency and make for better recording when people go to fill out the assessment form," he said.

Idaho wine grape growers pay an assessment of \$7 a ton on the grapes they grow, while wineries pay an assessment of 4 cents a gallon on



Capital Press File

The Idaho Wine Commission has proposed a new way to calculate the assessments for grapes and wine.

the wine they produce.

This can be confusing and results in unnecessary extra calculations by wineries, said IWC Executive Director Moya Shatz-Dolsby.

"Wineries buy the grapes

by the ton and then we're asking them to recalculate that" to figure out their assessment," she said. "The new rule is making it (easier)."

Wineries will also pay \$7 a ton on any grapes they buy

from out of state. However, if they purchase grape juice from out of state, they will pay 4 cents a gallon.

That's because in that case, the grapes have already been turned into juice and there is no other way to calculate it, Shatz-Dolsby said.

Most of the IWC's budget of \$500,000 comes from the state's wine excise tax, and the commission collects about \$44,000 a year in wine assessments, which are split almost evenly among growers and wineries.

The change in the assessment formula will result in the wine commission collecting about \$2,500 more a year from the state's 50 wineries based on current production, according to IWC calculations.

The pending rule has been approved by Senate and House committees and is headed to the floors of both chambers for final approval.

Potato equipment sales remain steady

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

POCATELLO, Idaho — Farm equipment manufacturers participating in the recent Agricultural Expo at Holt Arena say they're still doing plenty of business on machinery used in potato production, though sales of agricultural equipment in general has slumped.

Leaders in agricultural equipment production such as John Deere have reported sharp declines in sales during the past two years, due to depressed commodity markets.

The potato market has been no exception to low prices, with current fresh-market spud payments still well below production costs, as recently estimated by University of Idaho economists.

However, companies specializing in potato equipment, such as the Blackfoot, Idaho-based manufacturer Spudnik, say they're somehow bucking the machinery sales trend.

"We're doing a good business this year, maybe a little ahead of where we were this time last year," said Spudnik sales representative Phil Cardon, based in Pasco, Wash. "We'll still have a strong year. We've got strong orders."

If there's been a challenge for Spudnik recently, it's been keeping up with orders, said Cardon, whose company has improved controls in the cabs



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Evan McEntire lifts his 4-year-old son, Apolo Boyd, into the cab of a new tractor Jan. 17 at the Agricultural Expo in Holt Arena on the Idaho State University campus in Pocatello.

of its latest generation of field equipment. Cardon believes that the potato market can turn around more quickly than other commodities since spuds are perishable, and he noted Northwest fresh sheds have been "shipping hard since the very beginning of the year."

Brock Mitchell, vice president of sales with the Burley, Idaho-based potato equipment manufacturer Double L, believes the contract market with processors provides some stability for the potato industry, enabling growers to take advantage of new product innovations.

"Whether it's domestically or worldwide, potato equipment seems to still be

moving, in spite of some of the pressure on commodity prices," Mitchell said. "It will be interesting to see how it goes throughout the year, but it seems to be moving."

Bruce Nyborg, with the Rexburg, Idaho-based potato machinery manufacturer Logan Farm Equipment, said truck-bed sales have been strong as growers seek to harvest with less labor.

"Our sales have been steady," Nyborg said. "It's down a little bit this year, but it's still a pretty good year."

Dan Reeves, with the Blackfoot-based potato equipment manufacturer Milestone, highlighted his company's new piler at the Expo. It

should reduce bruising while allowing growers who often need to use side-by-side pilers to cover their largest potato storages to get by with a single machine.

Reeves said his sales have been flat.

"(Declining sales) are something you're seeing across the board in the agricultural industry, but we're staying steady with our Milestone stuff," Reeves said.

By contrast, Harvey Stushnoff, with Agri-Service in Twin Falls, believes hay-intensive growers have been especially hard hit by low commodity prices and are "hanging on to their equipment."

Idaho State University students host equipment rodeo at Agricultural Expo

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

POCATELLO, Idaho — Students in Idaho State University's diesel tech program have organized a rodeo with a unique twist in conjunction with the 38th Annual Agricultural

Expo — they're substituting heavy equipment for bulls and bucking broncos.

Their heavy-equipment rodeo Jan. 17-19 challenged competitors to move logs using a skid steer in the fastest time and to pick up volleyballs from atop cones and

move them into trash cans using a mini-excavator.

Participants paid a \$20 fee and competed for the chance to win a television or tool kit.

Proceeds will help ISU's Diesel Mechanics SkillsUSA team cover the costs of attending a heavy-equipment me-

chanics' competition in Boise. Diesel tech program officials hope to make the rodeo an annual fundraiser at the Agricultural Expo.

Hailey Wynn, vice president of the ISU SkillsUSA team, said the competition tests participants in areas such as hydraulics, electrical systems and transmissions, involving equipment used in agriculture, trucking, mining and construction.

Cody Johnston, a freshman in the program, said he'd nev-

er operated heavy equipment before the equipment rodeo but was offered a "crash course" and quickly got the hang of it.

"Anybody who hasn't done it before can do it, because I did," Johnston said.

Instructor Terro Anderson said ISU has a nationally acclaimed diesel technology program, training workers who are badly needed to service equipment for agriculture, mining and other industries.

"There is a deficit of mechanics in this state, and they've required us to hire another instructor to try to get more and more people to fill those positions...," Anderson said.

At the Expo, the ISU program also showed off a trailer students built last fall with virtual-reality machines simulating the controls of heavy equipment. Anderson said the program has taken the trailer to several Idaho schools as a recruitment tool.

Fertilizer and Irrigation Water Management

Crop Diseases

Falling Numbers

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Drone Flight Demo

University of Idaho

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4.5 CCA - Crop Management

Morning coffee/doughnuts and lunch provided

Host: Olga Walsh, University of Idaho,

Parma Research and Extension Center, owalsh@uidaho.edu, 208-722-6701

8:30-9 a.m. Registration, coffee & doughnuts/welcome		
9-9:45 a.m.	Efficient irrigation methods	Howard Neibling & Jim Klauzer
9:45-10:30 a.m.	Crop disease update	James Woodhall
10:30-10:40 a.m. Break		
10:40-11:10 a.m.	Precision fertilizer management	Olga Walsh
11:10 a.m.-noon	Low falling numbers demo	Katherine O'Brien
noon-1 p.m. Lunch		
1-1:45 p.m.	Soil health demo	Travis Youngberg
1:45-2:30 p.m.	Unmanned aerial vehicles	Craig Thompson
2:30 p.m. Adjourn		

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