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Idaho

Lawmakers close to setting budget for college of ag

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — As lawmakers prepare to set a fiscal year 2016 budget for the University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, CALS Dean John Foltz is explaining to legislators how state funding for the college is helping Idaho's farmers and ranchers.

Foltz told members of the Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee Feb. 19 that the college is the research and development engine for Idaho's agricultural sector.

"We feel we provide a lot of the research and develop-

ment part of what our producers do," he said. CALS has 11 research facilities around the state "and important research is happening at those locations."

Gov. Butch Otter's proposed fiscal 2016 budget includes an additional \$2.27 million in research and extension funding for CALS, which has a fiscal 2015 budget of \$26.5 million.

A total of \$1.53 million of that additional funding would support 21.5 new or existing positions and provide stipends for seven to 10 graduate research assistants.

Otter has also asked for an

additional \$752,000 for CALS to cover a \$185,400 increase in health benefit costs and \$566,400 in salary increases.

The Idaho Legislature's Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee is scheduled to set CALS' research and extension budget on March 3.

"I haven't heard any resistance to that request," said Sen. Jim Patrick, a Republican farmer from Twin Falls. "The governor's request is very reasonable."

Foltz highlighted several research projects CALS scientists are working on that have or will benefit Idaho farmers and ranchers.

CALS researchers have released 13 significant new potato varieties since 2004, Foltz said, and after the zebra chip disease was detected in potatoes in 2011, the college put together a 13-member team to address that issue.

UI plant pathologists are also working on ways to prevent and control bacterial ring rot in potatoes, he said.

"It's our largest crop and we're putting a lot of resources into helping producers deal with these issues," Foltz said.

CALS scientists recently released four new wheat varieties and are studying ways to control fusarium head blight in

wheat and barley.

When record rains pummeled a good portion of the state's wheat and barley crops in August, UI researchers jumped into action to help producers deal with the loss, Foltz said. That included inspecting fields for disease and quality deterioration and publishing a grower bulletin on how to handle malting barley injured by sprout damage.

UI Barley Agronomist Chris Rogers also published articles on losses from excessive moisture at harvest.

Foltz highlighted several other research projects or accomplishments, including:

- The recent release of five new varieties of canola and mustard.

- A study on beef cattle muscle physiology to find healthier beef cuts and another on sexed semen to improve bull calf production in cow-calf operations.

- A study on water-saving irrigation methods for major irrigated crops in Southern Idaho.

- Studies on pre-school aged children's taste preferences for hard red vs. hard white wheat.

- Developing ways to use dairy compost to manage waste and improve soil health.

Sen. Crapo eyes monument designation, public lands policy

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

POCATELLO, Idaho — Reforming public lands policy has been a recent focus of Sen. Mike Crapo's legislative efforts.

During a Feb. 20 town hall meeting here, the Idaho Republican discussed a bill he's introduced to require approval by both Congress and the affected state legislature before a president can declare a new national monument.

Crapo said talk of a national monument in Idaho's Boulder-White Cloud Mountains has placed the issue at "the forefront of people's minds." He said a monument is also being considered in his state's Island Park Caldera. Crapo said current policy allows the stroke of a president's pen to supersede local input and collaboration.

"The problem we have with any monument designation is it ties up management options for the use of land," Crapo said. "The potential for taking agricultural land out of production or restricting agricultural activities such as grazing, or the potential for impacting water rights that go beyond even the borders of the designation, are all significant factors."

Idaho Cattle Association Executive Vice President Wyatt Prescott believes the legislation faces a roadblock in getting a presidential signature, or overriding a veto, but he believes now is the time to pursue the concept, with Congress under Republican control.

Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Ida-



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, discusses how new federal regulations are choking U.S. businesses during a Feb. 20 town hall meeting in Pocatello.

ho, is expected to introduce a new version of a Hemingway-Boulders Wilderness bill he's long championed as a monument alternative, drafted with extensive local input. His latest version proposes 63,564 acres of wilderness — 22,195 acres fewer than the prior version.

"We would much rather have an Idaho solution and not a national monument," said Simpson's spokeswoman, Nikki Wallace.

Prescott said Simpson's proposed wilderness area includes about 7,000 animal unit months of grazing land, but a monument would encompass a much broader area.

"Our biggest concern is not being able to participate in the management plan in the event that something like (a monument) would happen," Prescott said.

Rep. Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, introduced an identical House companion bill on monument designation.

"Vast landscapes shouldn't become off limits at the stroke of a presidential pen," Labrador said in a press release.

About 62 percent of Idaho is federally owned. Crapo said he also supports the recent recommendations of a state interim committee's report that Idaho should investigate options to convert more federal land to state control.

Labrador intends to reintroduce pilot program legislation this year directing the U.S. Forest Service to defer management of up to 4 million acres to state control under, according to his spokesman. Crapo said he also supports the pilot program approach.

To help rural communities that have large acreages of federal land that generate no property tax, Crapo, Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho, and Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., have introduced legislation to permanently fund Payment in Lieu of Taxes, which provides funding for rural communities based on their percentage of public land. The bill also renews the Secure Rural Schools program — which offers funding for rural schools, highways and law enforcement — for three years at 2011 levels.

Crapo believes the programs meet a federal government obligation because of the "phenomenal burden on counties" with large tracts of untaxed federal land.



Carol Dumas/Capital Press

Trout are raised in raceways at the Rangen, Inc., trout farm. Idaho Department of Water Resources Director Gary Spackman has denied an appeal by groundwater users to acquire a water right to mitigate for water owed to Rangen.

IGWA to appeal Rangen mitigation right denial

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — Idaho Department of Water Resources Director Gary Spackman has denied groundwater users' application for a water right they contend the Hagerman-based Rangen, Inc., trout farm has been illegally using for more than half a century.

Idaho Ground Water Appropriators Executive Director Lynn Tominaga said his organization plans to appeal Spackman's Feb. 6 order to Idaho district court.

Last winter, Spackman ruled groundwater users west of a geologic feature near American Falls known as the Great Rift owe Rangen 9.1 cubic feet per second of spring water to satisfy the company's delivery call.

In the fall, IGWA started building a pipeline to transport mitigation water to Rangen from a nearby trout farm. When a Jan. 19 pipeline construction deadline was missed, Spackman ordered curtailment of junior Magic Valley groundwater wells, which would have affected several dairies and food processors. But Fifth District Judge Eric Wildman granted a stay until Feb. 7. IGWA finished the project on Feb. 5 and

commenced with water delivery on Feb. 6.

The irrigators hoped to replace the pipeline — and to provide additional mitigation for a second Rangen water call scheduled for a March hearing — with a 10-12 cubic feet per second water right at the Bridge Diversion of Billingsley Creek.

According to IDWR, Rangen had been using the Bridge Diversion for at least 50 years, though Rangen's specified right is for a different diversion called the Curren Tunnel. Rangen made its own application for the Bridge Diversion water right after IGWA.

Spackman's decision reversed a prior ruling by his own hearing officer approving IGWA's application for the Bridge Diversion. The director argued the application did not serve the public good and was made in bad faith, since IGWA's preference was to return the water to Rangen rather than building a new diversion.

IGWA attorney T.J. Budge noted his client's application included engineering for a structure to pump water to other Rangen raceways as an alternative.

"To say us having a way to mitigate is in bad faith is

absurd," Budge said. "Based on the priority system, we had priority."

Spackman affirmed Rangen's water right, allowing the company to continue using it. But he subordinated the right to irrigation in the interest of preventing future calls, an aspect of the ruling Rangen has appealed.

Rangen attorney Fritz Haemmerle said there's case law against water diversion by an applicant who doesn't own the surrounding land or have the land owner's permission.

"For them to expect anyone to overturn that is the height of arrogance," Haemmerle said.

Haemmerle also raised concerns about the legality of the pipeline, which he believes exposes more water to consumptive use downstream in Billingsley Creek.

A separate ruling by Judge Wildman determined Spackman erred by restricting the Rangen call to acreage west of the Great Rift, where hydrology is most directly tied with Rangen's spring. Wildman remanded the case back to Spackman, and his decision has also been appealed to the Idaho Supreme Court. Budge said the precedent could open up the entire aquifer to future calls.

UI researchers ponder 'local' market access

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

University of Idaho researchers want to determine the best way for farmers to access local markets.

Aaron Johnson, associate professor of agribusiness at the University of Idaho, recently sent a survey to 3,500 retail and restaurant produce managers in Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

The researchers are weighing how distance, price and seasonal availability impact the demand for local farm products, he said.

The researchers are allowing respondents to define what "local" means to them, Johnson said.

The study will determine how many players a market can handle. Producers could use the information to better understand pricing mechanisms and target areas for their products, Johnson said.

"If everybody comes back and defines 'local' within 50 miles, that's going to certainly draw a boundary for them," he said. "If they want to compete outside whatever that radius would be, they would know they're not competing on the local label, but they could compete in other ways."

The survey is part of a larger project, Johnson said. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture funded the three-year project for \$500,000 to support efforts by other UI Extension educators.

Sometimes the best way to get advice is to come right out and ask for it!



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