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Idaho

Idaho barley industry OK after 2014 losses

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Idaho’s barley industry has weathered the heavy 2014 losses caused by monsoon-like August rains with the help of its biggest customers and is looking to the future, not the past, Idaho Barley Commission Administrator Kelly Olson told Idaho lawmakers.

Idaho’s barley industry remains healthy, despite the losses, which are estimated at \$60 million to \$70 million, Olson told members of the House and Senate agricultural committees last week.

The monsoonal rains in parts of Southern and Eastern Idaho that are

largely deserts started Aug. 4 and didn’t finish for about five weeks, she said.

As a result, harvested barley acreage in Idaho was down 18 percent to 510,00 acres last year and production was down 17 percent to 47.94 million bushels.

But Idaho still led the nation in barley production.

“Despite all the headlines ... we remained on top of the industry in this country for the third straight year,” she said. “Despite those difficulties, Idaho still produced 27 percent of the U.S. barley crop.”

Olson said the industry’s major customers used as much of the damaged crop as possible, given their quality pa-

rameters, which helped limit the damage.

Ninety-two percent of the state’s malt barley crop was in the path of those August storms and the industry initially feared as much as 60 to 80 percent of the state’s malt barley crop could be lost.

But a joint IBC/University of Idaho crisis action plan to deal with the damage and the assistance of the state’s major customers helped limit the losses, Olson said.

Beer and malt companies in Idaho have made large capital investments in the state and “they suffered economic losses right along with the producers in 2014,” Olson told the Capital Press

later.

“But they have all in various ways really made extraordinary efforts to take as much of the barley as they could and make it work ... to try to limit the losses to the producers,” she said.

IBC member Dwight Little, a barley farmer from Teton, said the malting plants in Idaho “went the extra mile in using as much of the 2014 barley crop as they could.”

“Those folks have made tremendous investments in our area (and) the reason they did that was because we don’t have events like we had last fall,” he said. “They understand that stuff happens some times.”

Little said those companies have

come up with decent malt barley contracts for this season compared with other crop prices, “which bodes well for growers and shows us they remain committed to what we do.”

Idaho’s barley industry is in good shape, its customers are standing by the state’s barley producers and they are both looking to the future, Olson said.

“We’re not looking back; we’re looking forward,” she said.

As a result of the losses, income from Idaho’s barley assessment will decline from an estimated \$635,000 to \$529,000 this fiscal year, and the commission’s reserve fund will likely be drawn down from \$509,000 to \$358,000.

Idaho cottage food bill advances despite scrutiny

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Legislation that would set standards for Idaho’s cottage foods industry has made it to the House floor but only after facing close scrutiny during a committee hearing.

The bill would codify in state law that people are allowed to sell a limited amount of non-risky food produced in their unlicensed home kitchen directly to consumers.



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Supporters of an Idaho cottage foods bill discuss the legislation outside the House Health and Welfare Committee March 4. The committee voted 7-2 to send the bill to the House floor with a “d-pass” recommendation.

The bill would require cottage food producers to register online with the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, take an online food safety exam and put their product’s label online and include any potential allergens.

Only producers with gross sales of \$30,000 or less qualify.

They would not be subject to in-home inspections and would not be required to be licensed, said the legislation’s sponsor, Rep. Clark Kauffman, R-Filer.

The bill was opposed by the IDHW’s Division of Public Health, which argues that Idaho code already allows the

industry to exist.

While it’s true there is no language in existing statute that specifically addresses cottage foods, Idaho’s food safety rules “specifically state that the rules do not apply to (cottage foods),” said Patrick Guzzle, who manages the IDHW’s food protection program.

He said the program “has, for many years, allowed for direct to consumer sales of many food items without any food safety inspection, license or registration requirements, or dollar limits.”

Guzzle said the department opposes the legislation as it is written but would be OK with

a bill that simply codifies the department’s existing practices.

“This proposal, in our opinion, goes well beyond codifying our existing practices,” he said.

The bill faced tough questioning by some committee members, who asked how the cap would be enforced and balked at additional regulations.

Idaho Freedom Foundation President Wayne Hoffman said the bill would mean more government regulation for a large number of producers.

“I’d love to see a bill that says they are not regulated, period,” he said. “It would be about a one-sentence bill.”

That sentiment was echoed by several lawmakers but cottage food producers said they needed the legal certainty of being officially sanctioned by the state.

Under the existing uncertainty, “I don’t feel confident it’s a safe route for me to go,” Erskine said.

Idaho takes action on truck weight

By JOHN O’CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — Idaho’s House of Representatives has passed legislation urging the U.S. Congress to increase the state’s truck weight limit on interstate highways from 105,500 pounds to 129,000 pounds.

Idaho commodity leaders — especially those involved in sugar beets, potatoes and timber — strongly support the change, which they emphasize would bring Idaho in line with surrounding states including Utah, Nevada, Wyoming and Montana.

case to our counterparts here that our state is asking for fair treatment, and it’s not just a couple of senators and congressmen who are convinced this is the way to go,” said Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho.

Crapo recently introduced standalone legislation to raise Idaho’s trucking weight limit, which has remained lower than many other states since the government implemented an interstate trucking weight limit freeze in the 1980s. Rep. Mike Simpson, also R-Idaho, introduced an identical bill on the House side.

Crapo also intends to pursue an Idaho increase soon in a transportation appropriations bill, and he’s backing a bill to implement a nationwide 129,000-pound standard. Furthermore, he may pursue the change in the forthcoming highway bill reauthorization.

Mark Duffin, executive director of the Idaho Sugar Beet Growers Association, said 129,000-pound trailers are readily available to haul Amalgamated beets.

Five honored for East Idaho ag contributions

By JOHN O’CONNELL
Capital Press

IDAHO FALLS, Idaho — As a state lawmaker, Darwin Young championed legislation that provided lasting property tax relief to Idaho farmers and other large land owners.

The 90-year-old retired Blackfoot farmer also served as an Idaho Potato commissioner and was a founding member of the Idaho Underground Water Users Association.

For his contributions to agriculture and his community, Young will be among five new inductees to the Eastern Idaho Agricultural Hall of Fame, along with Marcus Gibbs, of Grace; Janis Johnson Ritchie, of Burton; Jay Wiley, of Carmen; and Ronald Carlson, of Firth.

Gibbs is a state lawmaker who served on the Idaho Potato Seed Advisory Committee and the Last Chance Canal Co. board. Ritchey has spent 47 years as a 4-H leader and 22 years as a director on the United Dairywomen of Idaho board. Wiley has served 30 years as a state brand inspector and livestock pollution investigator and is a past Idaho Cattle Association director. Carlson was water master for District 1 with the Idaho Department of Water Resources.

New inductees, selected by a 30-member board of directors representing many facets of agriculture, will be honored during a dinner beginning at 6 p.m. March 20 at the Idaho Falls Shilo Inn.

Blackfoot rancher and former state lawmaker Dennis Lake, who nominated Young, recalled his ingenuity in planting sod along irrigation ditch banks to prevent erosion, controlling the growth by grazing livestock confined within electric fencing.

But Lake has been most impressed by Young’s commitment to community service. Young was a Fifth District PTA president, a Bingham County commissioner, a Bingham Memorial Hospital board member, a school board member and a member of the Idaho State Tax Commission.

Young also volunteered to serve in World War II, manning the ball turret of a B-17 bomber. Young had close calls

during his 35 missions, once losing his aircraft’s No. 2 engine and propeller function.

“We counted the (bullet) holes, and we had 270 holes in the plane,” Young said.

Lake describes Young as the last of the living pioneers who broke out the desert west of Blackfoot for farm land. Young, married to Pearl, started farming in Blackfoot on 400 acres with his father and brother in 1952, buying them out a few years later.

He built the farm to 1,600 acres, before his son, Allen, took over operations about 20 years ago.

“Farming was a good way of life,” Young said. “I never had a moment’s time when I didn’t like what I was doing.”

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