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Idaho

Ag in Classroom teachers tour Idaho farm country

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

NAMPA, Idaho — Teachers who participated in a two-day tour of farm country June 8-9 said one of the biggest benefits of the event, hosted by Idaho Ag in the Classroom, was learning about the sheer number of jobs available in agriculture.

"The 'aha' moment I had was the careers I could be teaching my kids about," said Mountain Home Junior High teacher Julia Corder, one of 29 educators on the tour. "I'm finding it beneficial to see all the job opportunities for kids."

During the "On the Road Workshop," educators visited farms, a dairy, a seed company and other agribusinesses and were briefed on the many job opportunities available in agriculture.

While past workshops have included a day in the classroom, AITC officials decided to spend back-to-back days in farm country this year so teachers could experience as many different aspects of the industry as possible, said Idaho Ag in the Classroom State Director Rick Waitley.

"We are really emphasizing the importance of careers in agriculture," he said. "Today and yesterday, they've interacted with many, many farmers, ranchers and agribusiness leaders. The response has been good and we'll repeat this (format) in July in Burley."

Meridian farmer Drew Eggers, who spoke with educators about his operation, said it's important to get AITC teachers "out on the farm because they can actually see what's going on and ... hear from producers about



Submitted photos

Idaho teachers visit Stewart Farms in Nampa on June 8 during a two-day tour of farm country hosted by Idaho Ag in the Classroom. Some teachers said they were surprised to learn how many career opportunities there are in agriculture.

the challenges that agriculture faces."

AITC, which is affiliated

with the USDA and whose members include commodity commissions, educators and



John O'Connell/Capital Press

A truck travels northbound on Interstate 15 near Idaho Falls. Language included in the recently approved House version of the Fiscal Year 2016 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development appropriations bill would allow Idaho to increase its current truck weight limits, which would make shipping of agricultural commodities more efficient.

U.S. House passes Idaho truck weight bill

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — Officials say federal legislation giving Idaho authority to set its own interstate highway truck weight limit is closer than ever before to becoming reality.

Idaho's interstate truck weight limit has remained at 105,500 pounds since the federal government enacted a freeze on states' weight limits in 1991.

Late June 9, the U.S. House of Representatives narrowly approved the Fiscal Year 2016 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development appropriations bill, which included language specifically granting Idaho the right to increase its limit. Idaho state lawmakers, Gov. Butch Otter and an 80-member coalition with strong agricultural representation have lobbied for a 129,000-pound weight limit, in line with surrounding states.

Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, introduced the language, identical to a rider he added to last year's transportation funding bill. That rider was defeated, due to strong opposition, including from the railroad industry.

Simpson emphasizes heavier trucks must have more axles, distributing less weight per axle than a standard truck and increasing breaking power.

Simpson's spokeswoman, Nikki Wallace, is optimistic about the legislation's chances this time.

"Each year, he's been able to move it further and further ahead," Wallace said.

Sens. Jon Tester, D-Mont., and Steve Daines, R-Mont., are expected to try to introduce companion language to the transportation bill from a standalone truck weight bill previously introduced by Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch, both R-Idaho. The Senate is expected to act on the transportation bill before its upcoming recess.

"There are other concerns with the bill — not neces-

sarily (truck weights)," said Crapo's spokesman, Lindsay Nothern. "If we can get it in the bill, I think it will be OK."

Following a 10-year state pilot project with 129,000-pound weight limits that found there was no added wear on infrastructure or heightened safety risk, Idaho implemented a policy enabling businesses to petition state and local jurisdictions for routes with higher weight limits. Idaho Trucking Association President and CEO Julie Pipal said the policy has worked well at the state level, but "anywhere we need a connection on a local road, we still have challenges."

"We would rather have our major facilities with commercial vehicles on them and leave the local roads to local traffic," Pipal said.

Opponents of the truck weight legislation with Advocates for Highway & Auto Safety, including the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, say fatalities involving large truck crashes have risen by 17 percent in the past four years, and 76 percent of respondents to a public opinion poll opposed longer and heavier trucks.

Boise lobbyist Roy Eiguren, who represents agricultural commodity groups, grocers and other business leaders with the Right Truck for Idaho Coalition, said the facts — including Idaho's pilot project results — support increased truck weights. Eiguren said the change would mean multi-million-dollar savings for his members, including Amalgamated Sugar, as four trucks with 129,000-pound weight limits could haul nearly the same capacity as five trucks with 105,500-pound limits.

"This is the best opportunity we've had in a decade to get the legislation through Congress, and that's due to the fabulous efforts of Congressman Simpson," Eiguren said.

the lower Boise River.

A total of 2,088 acres have already been enrolled in the Natural Resources Conservation Service water quality initiative, which pays farmers to implement conservation practices aimed at preventing sed-

Researchers hope to bring cod to Idaho raceways

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — Research to conserve burbot (Lota lota), a freshwater cod found in Northern Idaho, has led University of Idaho researchers to explore the fish's potential as a commercial species.

The University of Idaho has been involved in conservation of the Kootenai River burbot for about 12 years, collaborating with the Kootenai Tribe to restore populations, which had collapsed by the mid 1980s.

The tribe wanted to recover the species, which holds cultural importance and provides winter fishery, Ken Cain, professor and associate director of University of Idaho Aquaculture Research Institute, said.

"When we got involved, they were functionally ex-

tinct," he said.

The collaboration has released nearly 63,000 hatchery-raised juveniles into waters in British Columbia and Northern Idaho since 2009 — waters that held only 50 of the fish when the project began, he said.

The university's early rearing technology has been transferred to the Kootenai Tribe's new hatchery at Bonners Ferry, and the researchers are ready to expand the conservation research to commercial potential.

"I believe it (burbot) has the potential to be reared under conditions here in the Magic Valley" (home to two-thirds of U.S. trout pro-

duction), Cain said.

There are challenges, however. The fish spawn in very cold water temperatures, typically under ice, and gender is difficult to determine. Researchers had to buy a chiller, determine gender with ultrasound and didn't even know if the fish would spawn in captivity, he said.

The larvae are fragile, hatching without a mouth and first absorbing the egg sack before starting to feed 10 days later. The researchers had to work with different incubator types to handle fungal problems and with larval feeding techniques and weaning juveniles to commercial feed, he said.

Larvae are fed Artemia (live brine shrimp) for one to two months, weaned on a combination of commercial micro-

farm organizations and businesses, provides instructional materials to K-12 educators to help them increase ag literacy and awareness in their students.

Mountain Home High School teacher Joe Anderson said seeing the industry at work will help him present the AITC material to his students in a way that's relevant to them.

"It's a huge benefit to actually get to see it in person," he said. "Agriculture has a big impact on the state and my kids need to know that."

Corder said she was impressed with how clean the dairy was and will pass that information on to her students because some of them may have only heard negative things about that industry.

"I wish more people could see that side of the (dairy) industry," she said. "I think it's good to educate the kids about that kind of stuff, too."

diets and Artemia for another 10 to 14 days then transitioned to a commercial weaning diet. Juveniles are reared on commercial marine-based diets.

In the future, researchers hope to reduce or eliminate the live feed diet, he said.

"Challenges to commercial production include optimizing larval rearing and minimizing cannibalism through grading and feed rate adjustment. Burbot show limited susceptibility to most trout or salmon diseases, but we need to determine how they will perform under varying water quality conditions," he said.

But the basic technology is established for spawning, incubation and weaning to commercial feed, and the species offers the potential to add diversity to Idaho's trout production, Cain said.

NRCS seeks farmers along lower Boise River for water quality initiative

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Farmers in Southwestern Idaho have a second opportunity to sign up for a voluntary program aimed at improving water quality in

the lower Boise River. A total of 2,088 acres have already been enrolled in the Natural Resources Conservation Service water quality initiative, which pays farmers to implement conservation practices aimed at preventing sed-

iment, phosphorus, bacteria, pesticides and other pollutants from reaching the river.

The program helps farmers implement water conservation practices such as drip or sprinkler irrigation, cover crops, stream bank protection mea-

sures and nutrient or irrigation water management plans.

The three watersheds targeted by the initiative — Dixie Slough, Outlet Boise River and Lower Sand Hollow Creek — run from Lake Lowell just south of Nampa to the

Idaho-Oregon border.

Those three sub-watersheds, which flow into the Boise River, have been identified by the state as top priorities for improving water quality, said James Eller, a NRCS district conservationist.

"We're trying to address as many impairments and potential impairments to those watersheds as possible," he said. Intensive agricultural production occurs in this area and many high-value seed and other crops are produced by the roughly 1,200 farmers near those watersheds.

NRCS officials said farmers who have enrolled in the program since 2012 have made a big difference but more work needs to be done.

"Through this initiative, we are taking a focused approach in treating areas with significant natural resource challenges," NRCS Idaho State Conservationist Curtis Elle said in a news release. "We look forward to continuing to work with producers in these key watersheds to help them have a positive impact on streams with impaired wa-

ter quality."

The deadline to submit an application for the second sign-up is June 19. Farmers interested in the water quality initiative only have to submit a simple two-page application before that date, Eller said.

A detailed conservation plan would be developed later.

To submit an application or to learn more about the initiative, contact the NRCS field office in Caldwell at (208) 454-8684 or 2208 E. Chicago Blvd., Suite A.

A side benefit of the program, which started in 2012, has been the large water savings realized as a result of the water conservation methods adopted by program enrollees, Eller said.

He estimates the water savings at 2.3 gallons a year, which equates to 7,000 acre-feet of water, almost 1 percent of the total storage capacity of the Boise River system.

"I did not expect to come up with that number," Eller said. "It's a water quality initiative, but the water savings, as it turns out, are huge."

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