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Idaho

Idaho ag export value dropped 25 percent in first half of 2015

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — The total value of Idaho agricultural exports is down significantly compared with last year and the state's string of four straight years of record farm exports will likely end in 2015.

Total Idaho agricultural exports were valued at \$436 million through the first six months of 2015, a 24.76 percent decrease compared with the \$580 million total during the same period in 2014.

Idaho set records for total value of ag exports from 2011 to 2014 but that streak will almost surely come to an end this year, said University of Idaho agricultural economist Garth Taylor.

"The export markets have been one of the real bright spots of Idaho agriculture the last several years and now we're seeing that melting away," he said.

But, he added, it's important to remember that "this comes on the heels of four straight years of record in-

creases. We're dropping from lofty heights."

Idaho ag exports through the first half of the year totaled \$500 million in 2013, \$466 million in 2012 and \$405 million in 2011.

The value of Idaho ag exports to the state's top four markets for farm products decreased during the first six months of 2015.

Ag exports to Canada decreased 21 percent to \$99 million and they were down 9 percent to Mexico (\$86 million), 28 percent to South Korea

(\$41 million) and 18 percent to China (\$28 million).

Foreign sales of dairy products, the state's top farm export, dropped 38 percent to \$131 million during the first half of the year and vegetable exports declined 15 percent to \$71 million.

Exports of products labeled under the "miscellaneous grain and seed" category dropped 17 percent to \$66 million, "milling, malt and starch" decreased 9 percent to \$51 million and the preserved food category was also down 9 percent to

\$43 million.

The totals are based on Census Bureau data calculated for the Idaho State Department of Agriculture by Global Trade Information Services.

Taylor said the decreases can be attributed to a strong U.S. dollar, the weaker Chinese economy and the disruptions at West Coast container ports.

"That strong dollar is hurting our ag exports to Canada, China, Mexico and all over," he said.

Lower commodity prices

are also a major factor, said Laura Johnson, who manages the ISDA's market development division.

"Commodity prices have dropped, so of course the total value (of ag exports) will be lower," she said.

There were some bright spots in the first-half numbers.

Exports to Indonesia, the fifth ranked destination for Idaho farm products, increased 19 percent to \$24 million and they were also up 40 percent to Peru (\$8 million) and 64 percent to Israel (\$7 million).

Idaho dry bean growers are harvesting early this year

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

WILDER, Idaho — Idaho's dry bean harvest is well ahead of normal.

"It's probably the furthest along we've been on this date in the last 10 or 15 years," said Treasure Valley Seed Co. Production Manager Don Tolmie. "We're really cooking."

Bean harvest in Southwestern Idaho typically wraps up during the second or third week of October but it could be virtually done by the first of October this season, Tolmie said.

Dry bean harvest here seldom starts before mid-August but it began in July this year, he said.

A lot of farmers who were concerned about having an adequate water supply this year took advantage of mild weather to get their bean crop in the ground early, Tolmie said.

"Everybody got their beans in pretty early because (they were) concerned about having enough water to get through (the season)," he said.

Parma grower Mike Good-



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Dry beans are sorted for quality at Treasure Valley Seed Co.'s production facility in Homedale, Idaho, on Sept. 4. Idaho's dry bean harvest is significantly ahead of normal this year and growers are reporting average to above-average quality and yields.

son has already wrapped up his bean harvest.

"Bean harvest was ... surprisingly early this year," he said. "The weather gave us a window to plant early and we had good summer weather."

He and several other growers attributed the early harvest to the favorable weather that allowed beans to be planted early.

"We had a mild winter and everybody got in their fields early," said Dana Rasmussen, a farmer in Paul in southcen-

tral Idaho. The early planting start was followed by warm temperatures that allowed bean plants to mature rapidly, he added, "and everything took off like crazy."

Bean plants are maturing fast and look good, said John Dean of Idaho Seed Bean Co. in southcentral Idaho. However, he's concerned about the number of blank spots he's seen in some pods that haven't been thrashed yet.

"Everything in the field really looks good, except when you open the pods, you do see a lot of blank spots," he said. "I'm a little concerned that yields may not be as high as first appearance makes you think."

A nine-day stretch of 100-degree days early in the season caused some heat stress to bean plants but the damage was minimal because it occurred outside of bloom set for most growers, Goodson said.

"I think overall, this year's crop will be above average as far as yields and quality goes," Tolmie said. "It's probably one of the best crops we've had in the last three or four years."



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Richard Johnson, owner of Grove City Gardens in Blackfoot, Idaho, holds up two ears of Mexican crazy corn, winner of the People's Choice Award for the best fair food in 2015. Johnson and Reed's Dairy of Idaho Falls are unique among fair vendors in that they produce the food they sell.

Locally raised corn wins best food

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BLACKFOOT, Idaho — The top food at the Eastern Idaho State Fair, according to online voting by fairgoers, was raised locally by producer Richard Johnson.

In addition to Johnson's Mexican crazy corn, Reed's Dairy, of Idaho Falls, cracked the top four in voting with its locally produced chocolate milk and ice cream.

"(Reed's Dairy) and I are the only ones at the fair that raise our own product or grow our own product," said Johnson, owner of Grove City Gardens in Blackfoot. "I think we have more control of the quality."

The fair was Sept. 5-12. Fairgoers cast their votes on Facebook, starting with 32 entries, which were whittled down in four rounds of voting until crazy corn emerged

as the winner of the People's Choice Award. Other foods in the "final four" included tiger ears and raspberry cream cheese brownies on a stick.

"It's something we've worked for and something we'll continue to live up to," Johnson said of the award.

Johnson believes the key to his recognition was starting with a solid base product — the triple sweet corn he raises on 13 acres at his farm. A few years ago, he bought roasters from a local family that made crazy corn and continued preparing their recipe — roasted corn doctored with a mayonnaise-based secret sauce, Mexican dried sweet cheese and chili-lime seasoning. The recipe has helped him add considerable value to his commodity, with crazy corn ears priced at \$4 each at the fair.

"Sales have been unbe-

lievable this year," Johnson said. "We've been breaking records."

He raises three different plantings of his 82-day corn variety to time harvests with his three major events — the fair, Shelley Spud Days on Sept. 19 and sales at the Wild Adventure Corn Maze on his farm, scheduled for Sept. 21 through Nov. 7. Mexican crazy corn is also a favorite when he caters weddings and special events.

Attendance at his corn maze has grown steadily. This year's maze will feature designs of Lewis, Clark and Sacajawea.

The Blackfoot Animal Clinic will host a petting zoo at the maze, and Johnson is also planning a barrel train, hay wagon rides, a pumpkin-carving contest, a race through the maze in which the winner must make it through first while successfully avoiding zombies and other activities.

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