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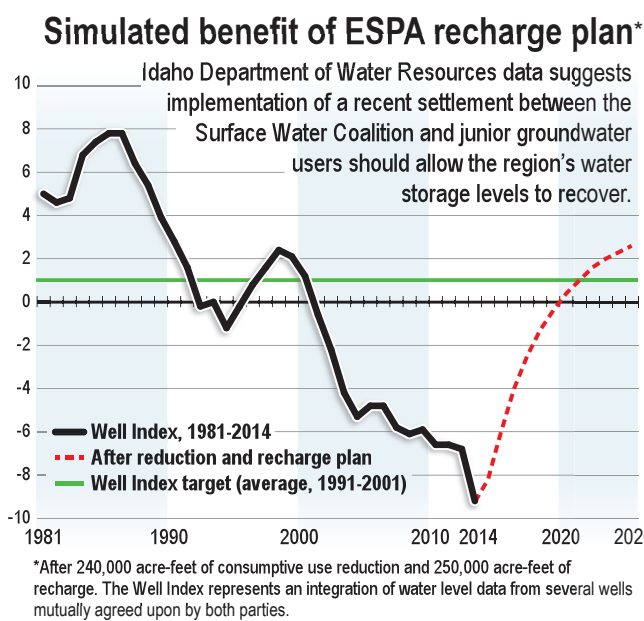
Idaho leader suggests new recharge funding method

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — New data by the Idaho Department of Water Resources shows implementation of a settlement between the Surface Water Coalition and junior groundwater users should also provide relief for the state's other major water calls.

However, Idaho House Speaker Scott Bedke, R-Oakley, warned his colleagues that finding a new, stable source of state funding for managed aquifer recharge could be integral in the settlement's success.

The coalition's seven senior surface-water users filed a water call in 2005 alleging junior groundwater pumping has depleted Snake River reach gains from American Falls Reservoir to Milner Dam. The



Source: Idaho Dept. of Water Resources
Capital Press graphic

parties began working on a settlement when it became clear in May that the groundwater users would fall short of meet-

ing mitigation obligations under the existing methodology order governing the call. As a condition of the settle-

ment, the well users agreed to reduce consumptive use into the future by 240,000 acre-feet — or roughly 11 percent per user. The parties have also agreed to support the state in its commitment to recharge the aquifer with 250,000 acre-feet of surface water per year, intentionally injected through wells, unlined canals or spill areas.

By 2026, the department's groundwater model estimates the settlement will lead to 200 to 250 cubic feet per second of additional water flow in the Snake River near Swan Falls. For the first time, the state failed to meet minimum flows near Swan Falls this season under an agreement with Idaho Power, falling short by about 40 cfs for several days, IDWR Planning Bureau Manager Brian Patton said. The settlement would also

eventually lead to 25 cfs of increased flows into Billingsley Creek, which supplies the Rangen Inc. trout farm and other parties that have made water calls. Groundwater users recently built a pipeline delivering 7 cfs of spring water to mitigate for Rangen's shortfall.

"Although the term sheet was focused on the Surface Water Coalition delivery call, the implementation of those practices will have positive effects on all of the hot spots," said IDWR Deputy Director Mat Weaver.

Patton said recharge will also be a key component of reversing aquifer declines that have averaged 214,000 acre-feet per year. Patton said the state's plan is to hit 200,000 acre-feet of recharge by 2019 and to reach the full 250,000 acre-feet by 2025, but it will

cost \$30 million to build the infrastructure, and up to \$3 million will be needed annually for operations and maintenance.

The state has allocated \$5.5 million per year in cigarette tax revenue toward aquifer stabilization, but cigarette taxes have declined from nearly \$48 million in fiscal year 2007 to about \$36 million in FY 2014. Bedke also intimated there may also be additional demands forthcoming on cigarette tax funds.

"I think it's high time we take some steps to shift this to a dedicated funding source in the general fund and take it off of the cigarette funds. That was a Band-Aid we put in," Bedke said. "If we're serious about this, and I think we are, it's time to address that issue here within the funding structure."

USDA report reduces ag revenue record

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

MOSCOW, Idaho — Idaho set an agricultural revenue record in 2014, but not by the wide margin that University of Idaho economists previously estimated, according to new agency reports.

On Oct. 26, USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service estimated the value of the state's agricultural production at \$8.8 billion, representing an 8 percent increase above adjusted 2013 estimates. That report followed the agency's late August estimate placing cash receipts from Idaho agriculture at \$8.66 billion.

Both estimates fell well short of UI's report, issued late last December, estimating the state's 2014 farm gate receipts at a whopping \$9.7 billion.

The UI and USDA estimates have never been so far apart, said UI area agricultural economist Ben Ebom.

"My guess is (USDA will) eventually revise their numbers up closer to what ours is. I don't believe we're that far off of what actually happened," said Ebom, who's uncertain about the possible cause of the discrepancy.

UI agricultural economist

Garth Taylor said the university makes its forecast in December to give a more timely economic picture to the state Legislature, which would otherwise have to wait several months for their first numbers from USDA.

Regardless of what happened in 2014, Taylor expects no production records will be set in 2015 or 2016.

"In my estimation, we're going back into that longterm grind of mediocre prices for agriculture," Taylor said. "The bloom is off the ethanol market, and our export demand is way off."

According to USDA's Oct. 26 report, milk was Idaho's top commodity in 2014, with production value increasing more than 24 percent from \$2.579 billion to \$3.2 billion.

Rick Naerebout, director of operations with Idaho Dairyman's Association, said 2014 brought record prices, above \$22 per hundredweight, combined with record production. Naerebout said prices have fallen to slightly below production costs this season — between \$15 and \$16 per hundredweight — as the strong market led to production increases. The high value of the U.S. dollar and economic woes in China have also hurt U.S. milk exports, he said.

Ag advocate will not seek re-election

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

WILDER, Idaho — Rep. Gayle Batt remembers that as a high school sophomore she wrote a paper that said her goal was to "bridge the gap between the farmer and the rancher and the government that over-regulates them."

As her time in the Idaho Legislature nears an end, the Wilder Republican says she hopes she has helped accomplish that.

"Hopefully, I was able to serve those folks in that capacity in the legislature," said Batt, who has announced she will not seek re-election after the 2016 legislative session.

Batt said she appreciates "the support that I've received from the agricultural community and the opportunity to represent them. They are doing a great job — they truly are stewards of the land and the environment — and I consider it a privilege that I got to be a voice for them."

Caldwell farmer Matt Dorsy said Batt's farming knowledge and close involvement with the industry made her an important voice for farmers and ranchers when it came to legislation that impacted them.

"It's going to be dang hard if not impossible to find someone with her dedication, moral character and knowledge about agriculture to replace her," he said. "She gets ag."



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Rep. Gayle Batt, R-Wilder, stands in front of her family's farm Oct. 6 as corn is harvested. Batt, who has been involved in several important bills involving farming, has announced she will not seek re-election.

Batt, who grew up on her family farm, received a bachelor's degree in agricultural business management from Oregon State University and serves on the House Agricultural Affairs Committee.

She worked closely with several farm groups and was named a "Friend of the Idaho Grain Producers Association" and received Idaho Food Producers' Ag All-Star Award every year she served in the legislature.

Batt was appointed by Gov. Butch Otter to serve the remainder of the late Pat Taka-

sugi's term in Idaho's House of Representatives. She was re-elected twice and her current term expires in November 2016.

During her time in the legislature, Batt led an effort that convinced the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality to change its rules to ensure farmers and ranchers cannot be fined for creating dust.

She also successfully worked with crop dusters to pass legislation ensuring they are alerted to the presence of wind towers and helped get a bill passed that gives farmers

a greater say on how money from Idaho's commodity and seed indemnity funds is spent.

She helped broker an agreement solving a dispute between Pioneer Irrigation District and the city of Caldwell over the use of eminent domain, preventing the need for legislation.

She also said she has no apologies for being the House sponsor of the Agricultural Security Act, which made it illegal to secretly film farming operations but was recently overturned by a district court judge.

Simplot, universities to develop GMO spud for Asia

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — J.R. Simplot Co., in cooperation with two Midwest universities, is developing a new line of genetically modified potato varieties intended to help fight hunger in Bangladesh and Indonesia.

The U.S. Agency for International Development announced Oct. 26 that it's awarded a \$5.8 million grant to Michigan State University to partner with University of Minnesota and Simplot in developing biotech Asian spud varieties with genes introduced to resist late blight.

Simplot has taken a lead in commercializing biotech spuds. The Idaho-based company's growers recently harvested their first commercial crop of Innate potatoes, engineered to be less susceptible to bruising and black spots and to fry with lower levels of acrylamide, a chemical investigated as a possible carcinogen formed during baking or frying.

The initial Innate spuds will be sold in the fresh market.

The second Innate generation, which possesses the original traits plus resistance to common U.S. late blight strains and lower sugars, has already been deregulated by USDA and is awaiting review by FDA and EPA.

Simplot spokesman Doug Cole said potatoes are a food staple in Bangladesh and Indonesia, but in such hot, humid climates, growers must spray for blight daily and still experience sharp yield losses. In addition to helping the countries improve their food security with fewer

chemical inputs, Cole said the USAID grant research should further Simplot's efforts to develop third-generation Innate lines for U.S. production with even stronger blight resistance.

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