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Idaho shooting sparks open range debate

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

POCATELLO, Idaho — A recent incident in which a car collided with a bull on U.S. 95 near Council, Idaho, and the rancher who owned the animal was subsequently killed during a shootout with deputies has sparked a renewed debate on Idaho's longstanding open range law.

An opinion piece authored by Hailey-based Western Watersheds Project concludes the incident provides further proof that Idaho's open range law is antiquated and that "private property rights in Idaho apparently only apply to ranchers."

Officials with Idaho Farm Bureau Federation, however, believe the conservation group crossed an ethical line to score political points, callously building its arguments on a tragedy.

Two people in the Subaru that hit the bull were airlifted to a local hospital following the crash at 6:45 p.m. on Nov. 1. Details of their conditions have not been released.

The bull's owner, Jack Yantis, 62, of Council, arrived as Adams County Sheriff's deputies were poised to put down the agitated animal, according to an Idaho State Police press release. Gunfire ensued. Yantis died at the scene, and a deputy sustained a minor injury, according to police.

"The events that transpired over the course of the next few minutes are under investigation, but, at this time, it is believed that two deputies and Mr. Yantis all fired their weapons," police said in the press release.

According to media reports, Yantis' wife suffered a heart attack after learning of the incident.

Western open range laws date back to 1880s, when the region was being settled and cows commonly grazed

unfettered. Idaho's law applies to "all unenclosed lands outside of cities, villages and herd districts, upon which cattle, by custom, license, lease or permit, are grazed or permitted to roam."

In the opinion piece, published on Western Watersheds social media sites and by Wildlife News, Ken Cole, Idaho director of Western Watersheds, argued Idaho's open range law is antiquated and places responsibility on accident victims rather than on livestock owners. Cole also wrote that he's seen open-range ranchers place water troughs along roadways, with little regard for the safety of motorists.

"There are several questions that need to be answered here. Did Yantis die because he felt emboldened by Idaho's open range laws to confront the deputies who were about to kill his prized bull for the protection of themselves and bystanders? Do Idaho's open range laws inflate the sense of entitlement felt by an elite class of people and put lives at risk unfairly?" Cole wrote.

Idaho Farm Bureau spokesman John Thompson acknowledges there are valid points on both sides of the open range argument, including by Eastern Idaho farmers who met with ranchers to address concerns about cattle grazing in their fields. But he considers it distasteful for Western Watersheds to seek to capitalize on tragedy.

"People are dead and fighting for their lives, and still people are saying, 'We're going to get political favor out of this deal,'" Thompson said. "We try to shine a light on the fact that they're trying to make political hay out of this situation, and hopefully people go, 'Yes, that is screwed up.'"

More farmers trade dairy for nuts, analysts say

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

A growing number of California dairies are diversifying their operations to include nut production — or switching completely to nut production, analysts say.

"Nut people, especially almond people, are scrambling for acreage ... and at least a handful of dairies have closed down and converted to nuts or sold out and bought other property" to grow nuts, said Vernon Crowder, senior vice president and senior analyst at Rabobank.

At the same time, the state's milk production will continue its modest annual increase, he said.

"We wanted to see if the trend of modest growth in dairy is going to change. Our conclusion is it's unlikely," he said.

While smaller or less efficient dairies are likely to be pressured to sell out and convert to nuts due to the increasing costs of water and land and environmental regulation, other dairies are there to buy their cows right away, he said.

At the same time, many dairies are adding orchards. "Most of our customers have diversified and are growing some kind of nut," he said.

It's increased their profitability and diversification. The only downside is they might have to buy more feed off the farm, he said.

But with the growing global demand for dairy products, producing milk will continue to be competitive with other California commodities, according to Rabobank's new report, "Milking Cows or Going Nuts?"

Nonetheless, milk price volatility and higher feed costs have squeezed dairymen's profit margins, and profitability in other crops has increased the cost of land with good water — land dairymen would want for feed production.

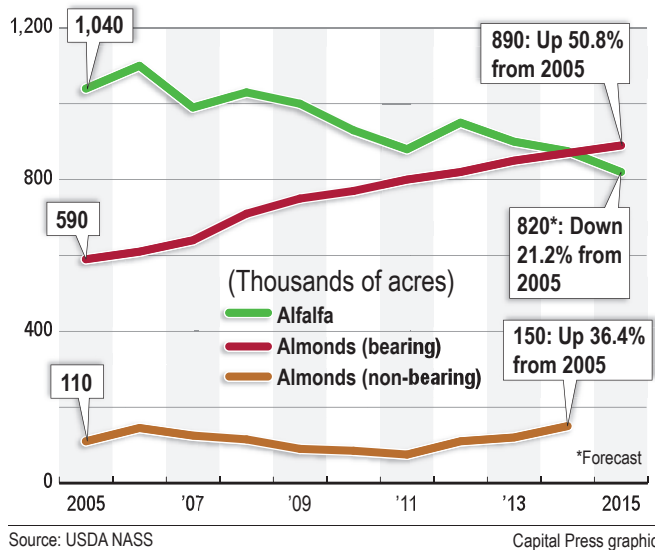
Those factors have increasingly led dairy farmers in the Central Valley to plant



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Cows are milked at VanderWoude Dairy near Merced, Calif. A growing number of California dairies are diversifying their operations to include nut production — or switching completely to nut production, analysts say.

California alfalfa vs. almond acres



Source: USDA NASS

Capital Press graphic

nut orchards to both diversify and generate more income per acre, the analysts reported.

During the last 10 years, the prices of almonds, walnuts and pistachios have increased due to growing export demand. A good yield on nut crops requires about the same amount of water as alfalfa in the Central Valley, and input costs for nut production are less volatile compared to milk production, Crowder said.

Those factors make orchard production an attractive alternative. But many dairy producers will continue to do what they know best, and their annual cash flow is usu-

ally more balanced than crop production, the report notes.

Still some smaller dairies — those that don't have the economy of scale enjoyed by larger dairies — might be tempted to take the plunge, sell the dairy and plant almonds, which are profitable even in a small-scale operation.

To assess the case for switching to nuts, Rabobank considered the profitability of a hypothetical California dairy and the impacts of switching part or all of its operation to almonds.

Taking into account the future relative profitability of

dairying and almond production, that assessment found the hypothetical 2,500 mature cow dairy with 95 percent of its 620-acre cropland planted to alfalfa would make a net profit of \$19.67 million in the first 10 years.

Converting the alfalfa acres to almond production would improve the dairy's 10-year net return by \$850,000.

Switching the entire operation to almonds, with 620 acres sufficient for 597 acres of almond production and allow for roads and other required land use, would net \$11.1 million in the first 10 years. The sale of the cows, equipment and infrastructure would fund the development costs of the almond orchard, the analysts stated.

If all price and cost assumptions were to continue for the life of the orchard — about 20 years — dairying would still remain more profitable, with a net revenue stream of nearly \$40 million. The orchard would have a net revenue stream of roughly \$35 million over that 20 years.

A key part of the dairies' success is the positive revenue streams from year one, whereas the orchard has a negative revenue stream in the first two years and doesn't break even until year five, the analysts noted.

Dairy markets start November strong; cheese still 50 cents below last year

CME, cash dairy prices started November on an up note. The block Cheddar cheese closed the first Friday of the month at \$1.70 per pound, up 8 cents on the week and the highest price since Oct. 12, but still 50 cents below a year ago. The barrels closed at \$1.65, up 5 1/2-cents on the week but 47 cents below a year ago. Only one car of block traded hands last week and 23 of barrel.

The blocks inched a penny higher Monday but gave it back Tuesday. The barrels

Dairy Markets
Lee Mielke



dropped 2 3/4-cents Monday and lost 3 1/4-cents Tuesday, dipping to \$1.59, an unsustainable 11 cents below the blocks.

Steady milk intakes have translated into steady cheese production, according to Dairy Market News (DMN). Processors say on occasion they are short a load or two of milk, but are hesitant to

buy unless the milk can be purchased at a discount. Manufacturers report domestic orders for natural cheese has been strong, with some customers willing to take extra loads. Food service demand has been solid. Interest in barrels has grown.

Some Western contacts reported strong milk supplies have allowed them to maintain full cheese production schedules. Although milk production has decreased following seasonal trends, most processors are not having any trouble get-

ting milk. Cheese demand from food service and retail is still good.

Spot butter closed Friday at a lofty \$2.8850 per pound, up 11 1/2-cents on the week on unfilled bids, 87 3/4-cents above a year ago, and the highest spot price since Sept. 28, 2015. No butter was traded last week at the CME.

The cash price was unchanged Monday and Tuesday.

DMN says "butter production in the Central region is active, with churn

operators pulling spot cream loads as they can to beef up production runs. Spot cream availability varies, with some buyers reporting they are once again competing with Class II manufacturers to obtain cream."

"Western butter production remains active. A few manufacturers report they are near or at capacity. Cream supplies are tight as some butter makers seek extra loads to make print butter for remaining seasonal orders. A number of manufacturers report butter

inventories are tight. Domestic pull has been strong, but as the peak butter season passes, some industry contacts are asking when the demand will be satisfied and an adjustment in price will follow."

Cash Grade A nonfat dry milk finished Friday at 81 cents per pound, up a half-cent on the week but 37 cents below a year ago. Eleven cars were sold last week at the CME.

The powder was also unchanged Monday and Tuesday.

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