

# Wheat production fell in 2014, but quality improved

**By SEAN ELLIS**  
Capital Press

BOISE — Idaho farmers produced more commercial-quality wheat in 2015 than they did in 2014 but overall production in the state was down to its lowest level since 2007.

Idaho’s 2014 crop was severely impacted by torrential August rains that reduced quality and resulted in about 20 percent of the crop being sent to feed channels. About 2-3 percent ends up there in a typical year.

There were no major quality issues this year but a long stretch of triple-digit heat and a bout of barley yellow dwarf virus in winter wheat reduced overall yields, according to industry officials.

“Compared to last year, we’ll be down production-wise but we’ll have more commercial-quality wheat than we had last year,” said Idaho Wheat Commission Executive Director Blaine Jacobson. “The quality is very good.”

According to USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service, 1.2 million acres of wheat was planted in Idaho during the 2015 season and Gem State farmers produced 85.5 million bushels of wheat.

That’s down from 1.27 million planted acres and 93.7 million bushels in 2014 and 1.32 million acres and 103.6 million bushels in 2013.

Wheat yields averaged 77 bushels per acre in Idaho this year, down from 78 and 82 bushels in 2014 and 2013, respectively, and the lowest yield level in Idaho since 2008.

The triple-digit heat occurred during flowering in a lot of areas and reduced yields, Jacobson said.

While the heat affected yields, quality was good in southwestern Idaho, said Richard Durrant, owner of Big D Ranch, a warehouse and seed dealer that farms 1,100 acres near Meridian.

Farmers in this part of the state were able to keep adequate amounts of water on their wheat crop, which resulted in low protein levels in soft white wheat that are fetching a premium of about 70 cents a bushel, Durrant said.

“We definitely would have seen a lot higher yields (if not for the heat) but in this area people are paying some pretty good premiums for low-protein soft white wheat,” he said.

Farmers in East Idaho said they were less affected by the heat and reported both good yields and quality.

“For the most part, wheat production in (East) Idaho was pretty good this year,” said Ririe farmer Clark Hamilton. “It was much, much better than last year. I haven’t cut that good of a crop in 15 years.”

“We had probably the best crop we ever had,” said Ririe farmer Gordon Gallup, whose 2014 crop was devastated by the heavy August rains. “We’re at about (5,000) feet so the heat didn’t hurt us quite as bad.”

Jacobson said the industry expects to have a rebound in total wheat production for the 2016 season.

“The positive thing is that our sales of winter wheat seed are up,” he said. “We do expect the crop will be larger next year than what we had this year.”

# NASS: Ag land values in Idaho increased 5 percent in 2015

**By SEAN ELLIS**  
Capital Press

BOISE — Ag land values in Idaho rose 5.3 percent this year, to an average of \$3,200 per acre for all cropland.

USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service estimates the average value of irrigated farmland in Idaho at \$4,830 an acre in 2015, up 5 percent from 2014, and the average value of non-irrigated farmland at \$1,400 an acre, a 6.1 percent increase over last year.

NASS also showed the average value of pasture in Idaho at \$1,250 an acre in 2015, up 2.5 percent over 2014.

Farmers were a bit surprised that ag land values continued to rise, despite falling commodity prices, but agricultural economists and real estate agents and assessors mostly said the numbers make sense.

“Values are strong,” said Eric Stroschein, an appraiser in Rabo AgriFinance’s Nampa office. “Realtors say that they have a lot more buyers than sellers. It’s hard to believe given that commodity prices are in the tank (but) it makes sense.”

University of Idaho Agricultural Economist Ben Eborn said there’s typically a lag time of a year or two between falling commodity prices and their impact on farmland values.

“There’s no doubt land values skyrocketed the last few years (but) we’re probably due for a reality check,” he said. The current land value numbers “are all based on the good commodity prices we’ve had.”

According to NASS, the average ag land value in Idaho has risen every year since 2011 and has increased 30 percent since then, from \$2,470 an acre to \$3,200.

The average value of irrigated cropland in Idaho has increased from \$3,820 an acre in 2011 to \$4,830 an acre in 2015, while the average value of non-irrigated cropland has risen from \$1,210 an acre to \$1,400 an acre during that time.

Growers, including Rep. Clark Kauffman, a Republican farmer from Filer, were surprised by the increase in ag land values this year.

“I’m a little surprised it has gone up,” Kauffman said. “I can’t explain that.”

According to NASS, the average value of all cropland in the United States in 2015 was \$4,130 an acre, an increase of 0.7 percent over 2014.

The Idaho data is based on 163 in-person interviews NASS enumerators conducted with Gem State farmers in June. While being interviewed for USDA’s June 30 crops report, farmers were also asked about the current market value of certain segments of land pre-identified by NASS.

“It’s definitely farmers’ information being provided to us,” said Vince Matthews, director of the NASS Idaho field office.

John Chidester, an independent appraiser who assesses ag land for counties in Southeast Idaho, said he doubts ag land values in Idaho have increased since June.

Farmland values may have increased as of the spring, “but by now, I don’t think they’re going up any more ... since commodity prices really started falling this spring and summer,” he said. “I don’t think they’re going down, just holding steady.”

Mint is harvested in a field near Wilder, Idaho, Sept. 4. According to USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service, the average value of cropland in Idaho increased 5.3 percent this year.



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

# Proposed national park, PCN top resolution list for Idaho Farm Bureau meeting

**By JOHN O'CONNELL**  
Capital Press

POCATELLO, Idaho — Members of Idaho Farm Bureau Federation will soon take positions on issues including establishing a Craters of the Moon National Park, the country-of-origin labeling, controversy over the state’s pale cyst nematode eradication program, and labor strikes or slowdowns at coastal ports.

The issues are included among several resolutions proposed by individual counties for members to consider during the organization’s annual meeting, Dec. 1-3 at the Shoshone-Bannock Hotel in Fort Hall.

Several speeches, awards presentations and officer elections are also on the agenda.

Farm Bureau spokesman John Thompson expects a proposal to designate a national park at the current Craters of the Moon National Monument will be the most contentious resolution. Twin Falls County Farm Bureau has proposed that statewide Farm Bureau oppose the change, but Thompson said there are plenty of members who also support it or believe Farm Bureau should remain neutral. Proponents believe the change would increase tourism and help struggling local economies, and nothing would be different but the name on the signs.

Thompson explained some Farm Bureau members worry “something could happen that affects agriculture and they reduce grazing access or something like that on the monument.”

Another hot topic will be a proposal to change the organization’s position from supporting mandatory country-of-origin labeling to endorsing voluntary labeling, Thompson said. Farm Bureau has scheduled a similar vote on products containing genetically modified ingredients, proposing to shift from opposing labeling to supporting a voluntary national labeling standard.

Latah County has proposed increasing from three to 10 the maximum number of cows allowed for raw milk production without rigorous testing requirements.

Latah, Clearwater and Lewis counties have proposed a resolution backing any legislation to ban slowdowns or strikes by unions at ship ports.

Regarding endangered species, Farm Bureau is scheduled to consider an endorsement of removing federal protection for the Greater Yellowstone grizzly bear population.

Farm Bureau will also weigh in on the state and federal program to eradicate pale cyst nematode, a harmful potato pest only found in the U.S. within a small area of Eastern Idaho. Affected farmers say chemicals to treat the nematodes have harmed their soil, and they’ve endured costly sanitation requirements, carrying a burden that should be shared by the entire industry, Thompson said.

The resolution reads: “We support a federal and state pale cyst nematode program that is based on good science, stakeholder participation and minimal impact to grower operations.”



By John O'Connell/Capital Press

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# Pulse production down, prices inch upward

KENDRICK, Idaho — Pulse crop production in Idaho plummeted this year because of severe heat and lack of rain during the growing season.

However, Idaho is a national leader in the production of pulse crops — dry peas, lentils and chickpeas — and the sharply reduced production is putting upward pressure on prices.

“It’s not a good production year,” said Kendrick farmer Robert Blair, whose dry pea production was significantly below normal this year.

Blair and other pulse farmers said a 10-day stretch of 100-degree temperatures, during bloom time, impacted yields. A lack of moisture during the growing season exacerbated the problem.

“Here on the farm, we went about three months with no measurable rain,” Blair said.

“On my farm, production was way down,” said Moscow farmer Craig Fleener, who grows small chickpeas. “It was too hot and too dry.”

Production of all pulse crops in Idaho is down by about one-third across the board compared to normal, said Dirk Hammond, administrative services manager for George F. Brocke and Sons, which processes peas, lentils and chickpeas in Kendrick.

According to the USA Dry Pea & Lentil Council, green pea production in Idaho totaled 55.3 million pounds in 2015, down from 76 million pounds in 2014. That’s despite the fact growers planted 44,500 acres of green peas this year, up from 42,561 acres last year.

Green pea yields averaged 1,242 pounds per acre this year, down 30 percent from 1,785 last year.

“The last time we had a (green pea yield) year like that was in 1977,” said the council’s executive director, Tim McGreevy. “It was pretty grim.”

Small lentil production in Idaho totaled 13.4 million pounds in 2015 versus 13.7 million pounds in 2014 and yields averaged 812 pounds an acre this year compared with 1,132 last year.

Medium lentil production totaled 8.4 million pounds, down from 10 million pounds in 2014, and yields averaged 682 pounds per acre this year vs. 1,111 last year.

Idaho growers produced 42.6 million pounds of large chickpeas in 2015, down from 56.7 million pounds in 2014 and yields averaged 1,151 pounds per acre vs. 1,337 last year.

Small chickpea production in Idaho totaled 37.5 million pounds in 2015 vs. 39.3 million pounds in 2014 and yields averaged 1,200 pounds per acre this year, compared with the 10-year average of 1,483.

Washington experienced a similar reduction in pulse production. The two states together produce about 85 percent of all chickpeas in the country and about 20 percent of all peas and lentils.

The silver lining to the reduced crop is that prices are heading upward, McGreevy said.

Lentils are trading at 38-42 cents a pound and “we haven’t seen that for quite a while,” he said.

Chickpeas, at 29-32 cents a pound, have inched up since harvest.