

# Rice: A staunch defender of farming

Jim Rice, a lawyer, sees importance of healthy agricultural industry in Idaho

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

BOISE — Sen. Jim Rice is not a farmer or rancher, as most chairmen of agriculture committees in the Idaho Legislature have been.

Growing up in the Kuna area of Southwestern Idaho, he was the only male student in his freshman high school class who didn't belong to FFA.

But many of his neighbors were farmers, he moved irrigation pipe as a youngster, and he gained an appreciation for agriculture at a young age. He still points out which crops are growing in fields to passengers when driving through farm country.

"Agriculture is a huge portion of our economy," the Caldwell Republican said. "It's something that is vital to our state's economy, and it will remain vital."

Heading into his second session as chairman of the Idaho Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee, Rice has built a reputation as a staunch defender of farming and ranching.

"Senator Rice has been really supportive of agriculture and he's a quick learner," said



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Sen. Jim Rice, R-Caldwell, is the chairman of the Idaho Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee. Rice is not afraid to use the chairman's power to kill legislation that could harm agriculture.

Sen. Jim Patrick, a Republican farmer from Twin Falls and an ag committee member. "I fully support him."

When it comes to agriculture and legislation, Rice believes less is better.

"Idaho's done a good job with agriculture," he said. "You don't need to be doing a bunch of legislation about agriculture. In fact, if you do, you're probably going to screw it up."

The 50-year-old lawyer was appointed to a Senate

seat in March 2012 by Gov. Butch Otter. The upcoming legislative session will be his fourth full one, and he has served on the ag committee every year.

Rice said he welcomed the chance to chair the ag committee because "we need to make sure what we do from a policy standpoint doesn't ... create problems for agriculture. ... It's important to get it right and keep it right and not get off into something that's detri-

mental to agriculture."

Rice said that if proposed legislation threatens to harm agriculture, he's not afraid to use the chairman's power to make sure it doesn't go anywhere.

"If something is bad enough for agriculture that it needs to be retained in a drawer, it should be," he said. "I think that's one of the reasons you want an ag chair that really believes in defending agriculture. You don't let attacks on agricul-



Sean Ellis/Capital Press file

Sen. Jim Rice, R-Caldwell and chairman of the Idaho Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee, has spoken out in defense of Treasure Valley irrigators in their battle with the state. Rice, an attorney, has earned a reputation as a staunch defender of agriculture.

## Sen. Jim Rice

**Position:** Chairman of the Idaho Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee

**Profession:** Attorney

**Background:** Born in Concord, Calif., raised in Southwestern Idaho

**Education:** Juris doctor, William Howard Taft University

**Family:** Wife, Trish, eight children, seven grandchildren

he was also one of the leading voices in defending the Idaho Agricultural Security Act.

Food Producers of Idaho Executive Assistant Benjamin Kelly said Rice understands rural issues and has shown an appreciation for the challenges private landowners face on a daily basis.

"Our farmers and ranchers have always found him willing to listen to the specific needs that face agriculture as well as act as a sounding board in matters that affect the entire state," Kelly said.

*This story first appeared on Jan. 8, 2016.*

# Agricultural voice speaks 'farmer talk'

Benjamin Kelly comes from suburbs to represent ag in halls of state Capitol

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

MERIDIAN, Idaho — In eight years, Benjamin Kelly has gone from a former suburban kid with no farming background to the leader of several farm organizations and a major voice for Idaho agriculture.

Kelly, 34, is the executive director of four farm associations and lobbies at the Idaho Legislature for eight more.

He's a private consultant and president of his own firm, Kelly Associates, and serves as the executive assistant for Rick Waitley, executive director of Food Producers of Idaho and president of Association Management Group, which represents a several Idaho ag groups.

Despite his non-farm background, "(Kelly) has been adopted by farmers as a good spokesman for agriculture," said Meridian farmer Drew Eggers. "He's very engaged and involved and he does a great job representing his clients in agriculture as a whole."

Born and raised in Meridian in Southwestern Idaho, Kelly graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science from Boise State University and interned with a lobbying firm at the Idaho Legislature in 2007.

He was noticed by Waitley, who offered to help him with his resume but was secretly taking note of his abilities.

Waitley offered him a job and Kelly's first several years were spent shadowing Waitley during his work with Idaho Ag in the Classroom and organizing the annual Idaho Ag Summit and other farm-related meetings, tours and events.

"Eventually I observed that he was good at one thing vital to our business — 'farmer talk,'" Waitley said. "If you can't talk 'farmer talk' to a producer, you won't survive. Any farmer or rancher can sniff out a fake."

Waitley slowly handed some of his clients over to Kelly, who represents farm groups during the legislative session on bills they're interested in and tries to bring in farmers and ranchers to testify when possible.

Dennis Tanikuni, assistant director of governmental affairs for Idaho Farm Bureau Federation, said Kelly "does a lot of positive

## Benjamin Kelly

**Occupation:** Private ag industry consultant, lobbyist

**Age:** 34

**Born:** Meridian, Idaho

**Education:** Bachelor's degree in political science, Boise State University

**Family:** Single

work for the industry ... and I think he'll be round for a long time."

Kelly said his biggest surprises in this career have been the high quality of the people involved in agriculture, and that he couldn't see himself working with any other industry.

"In other types of businesses, there's a cut-throat atmosphere; I don't find that in agriculture," he said. "A lot of (farmers) do a lot of stuff they don't get paid for and they're doing it to help out agriculture, Idaho and their community."

Kelly said his involvement in agriculture happened by accident "but it really was a fortunate accident."

He believes the biggest challenge facing agriculture now is the industry's need to go on the offensive about what farmers do.

"I think we need to find a way to get past just being on the defensive about our practices and what we do and really ... get on the offensive and be able to get our message out there," he said.

*This story first appeared on Oct. 16, 2015.*



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Benjamin Kelly, a consultant and lobbyist for farm groups, stands in front of the Association Management Group building in Meridian, Idaho, on Oct. 7. Though he grew up in the suburbs he has played an ever-growing role representing farmers in the Capitol.

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