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Idaho

New packing plant set to open in March

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

SUN VALLEY, Idaho — A new beef processing plant in Kuna, Idaho, is just months away from starting production and giving beef and dairy producers a much-anticipated packing facility closer to home.

CS Beef Packers is a \$100 million joint venture between Texas-based Caviness Beef Packers and Idaho-based J.R. Simplot Co. Discussions on the partnership began in 2014, resulting in the new 300,000-square-foot facility.

Family-owned and -operated Caviness had been looking to grow its operations for three or four years,

but the options were lacking. A lot of facilities were outdated, Caviness President Trevor Caviness told the Idaho Cattle Association convention this week.

The company's visions for growth aligned with the Pacific Northwest and Intermountain West, but it had no expertise in this area, he said.

"We found a very good partner in Simplot," he said.

Like Caviness, Simplot is a global agribusiness company, family-owned and -operated and with a mission of sustainable, environmentally friendly production, he said.

That sustainable focus fits well with Caviness and is one reason the companies are aligned, he said.

"The facility will be the most modern, greenfield beef plant ever" and is based on Caviness' proven model in Texas, he said.

Caviness' Texas operation processes 1,800 head daily in a system that also includes hide processing and rendering. The animal-welfare system at its plants in Hereford and Amarillo were designed by animal care expert Temple Grandin, he said.

"We have advanced technology to provide suppliers with the highest-quality carcass, yield and grade," he said.

The new plant will process cull cows and bulls to produce boxed beef but will also have the ability to process niche fed beef, such as

grass-fed cattle. Down the line, the operation could add ground-beef processing.

"The first phase will be beef packing 101, with new employees and a new facility," Caviness said.

The new facility will process 1,800 head a day, buying cattle within a 600-mile radius and selling beef products into the foodservice, quick-service and retail markets.

Products will carry Caviness' existing brands, with a plan to add new regional brands in the future, he said.

Caviness' business is built on relationships with producers and the community, and that culture will be the foundation of CS Beef Packers as well, he said.

"We fully believe in supporting the community and the people who work for us," which also aligns with Simplot, he said.

The company embraces transparency and welcomes visitors. The new plant is being built so producers or other visitors can view the entire process through windows, he said.

"The more information we can share about our process, the better for us," he said.

Managers for the new plant have already been hired and are training at Caviness' Texas operation. CS Beef Packers expects to employ 700 people, he said.

"We look forward to growing in Idaho and the region," he said.

Idaho Fish and Game push aims to protect farmers' hay

Hungry deer, elk ravaged crop last year

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — The Idaho Department of Fish and Game has invested \$500,000 to help hay farmers statewide build fenced enclosures to protect their harvested crop from deer and elk, following a bad 2015-2016 winter for depredations.

Growers hadn't reported much trouble with hay losses during the preceding four years, as mild winters enabled big game herds to find plenty of natural forage on higher ground.

However, IDFG officials say the string of mild winters also reduced winter kill of calves, allowing ungulate populations to build. Simultaneously, low feed prices prompted growers to hold onto a lot of hay, and more typical winter weather pushed game into the valleys.

"It was brutal over here in Blaine County," said John Guthrie, with the department's Magic Valley region.

IDFG Farm Bill Coordinator Sal Palazzolo said depredation payments to farmers were also up last winter, though many growers didn't bother with the hassle of applying. He said last winter's payments totaled \$310,000, compared to \$245,000 during an average year.

Heading into this winter, IDFG officials say growers should be in much better shape, thanks to between 80 and 100 new protective stack yards farmers built this fall, or are now completing, with materials donated by the department. Tapping funding from hunting tags, the department



Courtesy of John Guthrie/Idaho Department of Fish and Game

A new stack yard protects hay in Idaho's Magic Valley. The state Department of Fish and Game has significantly stepped up its efforts to build fenced enclosures to protect hay from big game following last winter, when growers experienced significant losses of their crops..

typically spends much less — between \$50,000 and \$70,000 per year — on materials to give growers building stack yards with 8-foot-tall wire fences.

They've been effective. Montpelier rancher Randy Lancaster, for example, said stack yards he built a few years ago with IDFG materials have eliminated problems in trouble spots, and he plans to apply to build two more.

The department also delivers temporary plastic fencing or wire panels to those without permanent structures, collecting the temporary enclosures during the following spring. Last winter, Guthrie said elk were routinely breaking through temporary barriers, and he received more than 50 depredation complaints from Blaine County alone, prompting the department to set up four elk feeding stations to curb pressure on growers.

Generally, the department provides designs for stack yards but requires growers build them. This season, however, Guthrie and a group of growers secured a \$40,000 grant from Blaine County to

cover 75 percent of construction costs. The county funding will cover construction of 14 of the region's 21 structures.

"We've got two construction crews running up there now," Guthrie said, adding IDFG also invested \$85,000 to give growers in his region materials.

Duston Cureton, with the IDFG's Upper Snake region, said the department usually provides materials for a couple of stack yards in his territory each season, but funded 13 this year.

"We've been doing this since the late 1980s, but not on this magnitude," he said.

Jason Beck, with IDFG's Southeast region, said 15 structures have been built in his area since August, sparing the Department the Transportation temporary fencing costs.

IDFG wildlife biologist Craig White said the department will also consider landowners when it begins setting hunting quotas in January. White said cow elk populations now meet or exceed department objectives in 16 of the 22 hunting zones.



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Local, state and Mill 95 officials break ground on a hop pellet facility Nov. 17 near Wilder, Idaho. Mill 95 will be Idaho's first hop pellet plant, which will give growers the opportunity to have their hops processed in-state. It's also designed to foster a closer relationship between hop growers and the craft brewing industry.

State will have its first hop pellet plant next year

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

WILDER, Idaho — By this time next year, Idaho will have its first hop pellet facility, which is designed to foster a closer relationship between Idaho hop growers and craft brewers.

Hops are turned into pellets for the beer brewing process but because Idaho currently lacks a processing plant, Idaho hops are sent out of state to be turned into pellets.

The new facility will provide Idaho hop growers with the opportunity to have their hops processed in-state.

The facility, called Mill 95, will include a hop pellet mill, two cold storage facilities and a pilot brewery aimed at bringing the region's hop farmers and brewers closer together, said co-founder Jamie Scott.

"Our goal is to build a facility that not only brings a crucial part of the brewing process — pelletizing hops — closer to Idaho farmers and brewers but also creates a

place for them to collaborate and innovate together," she said during a groundbreaking ceremony Nov. 17.

She said the facility "is an opportunity to really put Idaho on the map as a world-class hop region and keep hops in the state from start to finish rather than shipping them out to be processed as we do now."

Scott said the facility will increase the value and reputation of Idaho-grown hops.

Idaho is the nation's third leading hop producer, behind Washington and Oregon, and Mill 95 is being built just north of Wilder in the heart of Idaho hop country.

The state's hop acres have exploded in recent years, from 3,743 in 2014 to 4,863 in 2015 and 5,586 this year. That growth has been fueled mostly by demand from the craft brewing industry.

Scott hopes the facility will foster a stronger relationship between the craft brewing industry and farmers.

Mill 95 is "meant to create more synergies between

growers and brewers," she said. "We'll try to be a better line of communication to what the brewers are interested in and what the growers can provide."

Mill 95 Operations Manager DJ Tolmie said work on the facility begins Nov. 21 and the plant should be finished by August 2017.

The 20-acre site will include a 17,000-square-foot pellet facility, 40,000 square feet of cold storage capacity and a 6,400-square-foot brewery with space for events.

"I think it's going to be a big thing for the local hops growing community here to open up another pathway to set up some deals with some other brewers rather than having all of the hops leaving the state," Tolmie said.

The addition of Mill 95 to the state adds a valuable piece, processing, that has been missing from the hop industry, said Skylar Jett, a trade specialist with the Idaho State Department of Agriculture's market development division.

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