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Greener Pastures

Doug Warnock



Laboratory tracks down poisonous plants

By DOUG WARNOCK
For the Capital Press

Poisoning by plants can result in serious economic losses to livestock producers in the Western United States.

The Poisonous Plant Research Laboratory (PPRL) has continued to develop better understanding of how certain plants become toxic to animals and how livestock managers can take action to minimize the impact on their livestock.

A review of the history and future plans of PPRL was included in a recent issue of Rangelands, a publication of the Society for Range Management.

In 1895, the U.S. Department of Agriculture established a Western research program to investigate livestock losses from plant poisoning. This program took several forms over the years and was located in several places, but in 1955 resulted in the formal creation of the PPRL within the Agricultural Research Service. It is located on the campus of Utah State University in Logan, Utah, where the 10 scientists and 17 support staff operate in a modern facility.

Livestock losses from plant toxicity result from reduced weight gains, lower conception rates, abortion, reduced male infertility, lowered general disease resistance and death. It is estimated that livestock poisoning causes over \$500 million in losses to livestock operations in the 17 states in the western U.S. In recent years great advances have been made, but plant toxicity still takes a toll and is far from being under complete control.

The work done at the research station focuses on developing science-based guidelines for grazing livestock on rangelands with toxic plants, determining ways to reduce livestock losses from poisonous plants, improving feed and food safety by improving testing methods and safety guidelines, developing guidelines to reduce negative impacts on livestock reproduction and fetal growth, and improving animal performance and safety by developing parameters for genetic-based herd management decisions.

Through this research, good progress has been made in reducing the negative impacts of the following poisonous plants: veratrum, halogeton, lupine, locoweed, and larkspur.

An important consideration in dealing with toxic plants is the compatibility of animals to the environment in which they graze. It is possible to select animals on the basis of their adaptation to the rangeland and their ability to resist or tolerate the toxic plants in that location. Another area of research is the development of a diagnostic tool to identify the guilty plant when a dead animal is found through analysis of the stomach contents.

Research is needed to find ways to identify animal products that contain materials potentially harmful to humans consuming them. Certain alkaloids can be harmful to humans if eaten by the animals providing the meat or milk being consumed by humans.

One way to reduce the effect of toxic plants in areas with lower quality grazing is to find ways to establish palatable, adapted perennial plants in those areas.

An example is the Channel Scablands of Eastern Washington that has a consistent problem with crooked calf syndrome caused by certain species of lupine. The researchers are currently studying the possibility of seeding forage kochia in those plant communities to provide a more reliable alternative to the lupine and the poorer forage plants found in those areas.

In past years, USDA's PPRL has made good strides in alleviating the costly impact of poisonous plants on livestock grazing Western rangelands. More needs to be done and the scientists and staff at PPRL are in a position to make great progress as advanced science and new techniques become available and applicable.

Information on poisonous plants is available from PPRL and your local Extension office.

Doug Warnock, retired from Washington State University Extension, lives on a ranch in the Touchet River Valley where he writes about and teaches grazing management. He can be contacted at dwarnockgreenerpastures@gmail.com.

Dairy/Livestock

East Idaho producer inducted into Idaho Dairy Hall of Fame

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Idaho Falls dairyman Lynn Dean Pack was both honored and surprised to be named the newest member of the Idaho Dairy Hall of Fame.

“It’s exciting but it’s extremely humbling at the same time when you look at some of the names on the list,” said Pack, who was inducted into the hall of fame Nov. 17 during the United Dairymen of Idaho annual meeting.

Pack said he can remember his father and grandfather talking about some of the old-timers whose names are now alongside his in the hall of fame. His grandfather, Don Pack, was inducted into the hall in 1974.

Pack, 62, was raised on a dairy



Lynn Dean Pack

“It’s in my blood.”

UDI CEO Karianne Fallow said Pack’s long history of serving on local, state and national dairy industry boards and organizations stands out.

He has been an active member of the Idaho Holstein Association since 1976 and was elected to the Western Dairymen Cooperative Inc. board, which helped create the Dairy Farmers of America cooperative.

and has been involved in the industry since his earliest memories.

“My love for the industry started when I was just a little kid,” he told the Capital Press.

He served on the DFA board and as a DFA area council member for 20 years.

He was the youngest person to receive the Idaho State Holstein Association’s young breeder, senior breeder and master breeder awards and has judged 4-H and FFA dairy shows for 20 years.

Pack’s operation is small compared to most other Idaho dairies — he averaged 110 cows between 1976-2014 but downsized to about 50 in 2015.

He started with one cow to his name in 1976 and currently ships about 60,000 pounds of milk per month.

“He has been a long-time farmer dedicated to seeing our industry prosper,” Fallow said. “And while his operation is rela-

tively small, he’s been an active part of the dairy community for years.”

Pack said his success shows that dairy producers shouldn’t be judged on their cow-herd size but on their will to succeed and participate in the industry.

“Whether you’re milking 5,000 cows or 50 cows, we should support them and help them in any way we can to fulfill their dream,” he said.

He said his grandfather and father taught him a critical lesson that has helped him get through the lean times.

“They said when times get real crappy, just grab onto a cow’s tail and she’ll pull you through it,” he said. “To this day, those cows have pulled me through everything I’ve been through.”

Expert: Dairymen should get ready for rising milk prices

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — As the U.S. economy continues to improve, so will milk prices and dairymen need to make sure they are ready for that opportunity, an economist told producers during the United Dairymen of Idaho’s annual meeting last week.

“The U.S. economy is going up, the global economy is going up and milk prices are going up,” ITR Economics CEO Brian Beaulieu said to loud applause.

Beaulieu told Capital Press later that a dozen leading economic indicators point to rising milk prices and that an improving U.S. and global economy has historically meant higher milk prices.

The most recent average Idaho monthly milk price of \$16.30 per hundredweight is 2 percent above last year, he said.

“A stronger economy gets us better milk prices and we’re moving toward a stronger economy,” Beaulieu said. “The economy is growing at a faster rate and it’s going to continue to grow.”

With prices on the upswing, producers need to position themselves now to take advantage of that opportunity, he said. That means en-



Courtesy of United Dairymen of Idaho

Economist Brian Beaulieu told dairy producers during the United Dairymen of Idaho annual meeting that an improving U.S. and global economy point to rising milk prices over the next several years.

suring they have enough capital, equipment and labor.

“The next four to five years look to be up years,” he said. “Are you ready for those up years? You have to ask yourselves, do you have enough of whatever it is you need....”

With interest rates still at historically low levels, now is a good time for producers to borrow money or invest in new technology if they de-

cide to go that route, Beaulieu said.

“Make it happen, now, before the prices go up,” he said.

Twin Falls dairyman Willy Bokma said any dairymen who are thinking about making major investments in new technology are keenly aware of how the economic outlook will impact their bottom line and Beaulieu’s forecast bodes well for the industry.

New technology such as dairy

robotics is expensive and individual producers have to weigh whether investing in it will pay off in a reasonable amount of time, he said.

“The economic outlook is very, very crucial to our consideration of those things,” Bokma said. “Those types of things are really important for us to think about.”

UDI CEO Karianne Fallow said dairymen are hopeful that milk prices have turned a corner and there is already a lot of investment occurring within the industry.

“I’ve been out visiting dairies over the year and there is a lot of investment happening — new barns, new technologies, innovation, robotics,” she said. “Dairy farmers are investing, which tells me that they are taking advice like Brian’s seriously.”

Beaulieu said the biggest threat to rising milk prices would be if the policies of the new Trump administration resulted in a trade war or negatively affected current trade agreements.

“That’s the single biggest risk,” he said. “A trade war would be detrimental to our economy.”

But if President-elect Donald Trump follows through on his vow to lower taxes and rein in regulations, “it will help the economy grow faster,” Beaulieu said.

Lawyer: Idaho’s open range laws complicated

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

SUN VALLEY, Idaho — Idaho’s open range laws have come under a lot of scrutiny the last couple of years, and there’s a lot of misunderstanding and misinformation about those laws among the public and even ranchers.

It’s a complicated area due to the cross-current of federal, state and local laws, said Bill Myers, a public lands and natural resources attorney with Holland and Hart.

The scrutiny came to a head with the shooting of rancher Jack Yantis, Myers said during the Idaho Cattle Association annual convention.

Yantis was killed by two Adams County sheriff’s deputies in November 2015 after he was called to put down his bull that had been struck by a car on Highway 95 near Council. The owners of the car are now calling for change to Idaho’s open range laws.

There are “lots of wrinkles” in open range laws, and ranchers should pay attention to any proposed changes, Myers said.

The laws are difficult to wade through, and immunity on federal highways is unclear. But Idaho is a “fence-out” state — it’s up to landowners to fence livestock out of their land. Ranchers are not liable for damage or injury resulting from an accident involving wandering livestock, Myers said.

“But herd districts turn that on its head,” he said.

Herd districts are a legislative exception, wherein livestock owners must fence in their land to prevent livestock from roaming off their property and are potentially liable for any damage caused by their livestock.

Herd districts can be created through a petition of landowners to their county commission, or commissioners can simply do it by ordinance — not a herd district per se but a controlling of livestock, Myers said.

Herd districts cannot include state or federal land or impose liability on a highway district for damage or injury resulting from livestock. Nor can they prohibit trailing of livestock on a public highway



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

Bill Myers, a public lands and natural resources attorney with Holland and Hart, spoke about the complexity of Idaho open range laws during the recent Idaho Cattle Association annual convention.

or hold the livestock owner liable for any harm while trailing, he said.

Herd districts require a lot of fencing and cattle guards, and property owners within the district are on the hook for the cost through county taxes, he said.

“It can be a fairly significant tax burden,” he said.

Taxpayers pay the full cost of constructing and maintaining legal fences and cattle guards on the district’s border, including on private property, and 75 percent of the cost of construction within the interior of the district.

Maintenance of interior fences and cattle guards on private property falls to the property owner. Construction and maintenance after the creation or modification of the district also fall to the property owner.

There are approximately 300 herd districts in Idaho, with more of them in areas of higher populations, Myers said.

If an accident occurs outside an open range area, there is a presumption of negligence. That can be rebutted if a livestock owner had a legal fence in good repair. The vehicle owner could also be liable for contributory negligence if, for instance, he wasn’t driving properly, he said.

Weak week for cheese prices

By LEE MIELKE
For the Capital Press

Traders had to weigh the October Milk Production and Cold Storage reports in the shortened Thanksgiving Week last week.

They took the CME cheddar blocks to \$1.9150 per pound Tuesday but they closed Wednesday at \$1.86, down a nickel on the week but 28 cents above a year ago.

The barrels finished at \$1.69, down 6 cents on the week, 14 cents above a year ago, but at an unsustainable 17 cents below the blocks.

The blocks started this week losing a penny and a half and then dropped 6 1/2 cents Tuesday, to \$1.78 per pound, the lowest spot price since Halloween.

The barrels also lost a penny and a half Monday and were down 2 cents Tuesday, slipping to \$1.6550, still at a larger than normal spread of 12 1/2 cents.

There isn’t much for the markets to feed on this week in the way of USDA reports and traders await the next Global Dairy Trade auction, which is Dec. 6.

Dairy Market News reports that much of the milk freed up by the Thanksgiving holiday was finding its way into cheese vats. But “contacts say domestic retail demand has remained strong through the early stages of the holiday shopping season. Some suggest that food service orders have dipped somewhat in response to the holiday and from supply pipelines getting filled. Inventories are long for barrels and cheese used for processing, but much tighter for fresh blocks.”

Western cheese output is also “active and a lot of milk is moving through cheese vats,” DMN said. “Cheesemakers report strong seasonal retail demand for cheese, but also note buyers are starting to push back

Dairy Markets
Lee Mielke



against the higher prices.”

DMN adds that “although supplies of fresh blocks of American style cheese are low or at least committed, some end users see the passing of Thanksgiving and the fast-approaching winter holidays as a signal to slow their purchasing. Inventories of blocks and barrels used for processing are readily available. Because manufacturers are eager to keep older blocks and barrels moving out of their warehouses, some end users are making buys at heavily discounted prices.”

Cash butter closed Wednesday at \$2.0475 per pound, up 1 3/4-cents on the week but 85 1/4-cents below year ago.

Butter jumped 5 1/4-cents Monday but was unchanged Tuesday, holding at \$2.10 per pound, highest price since Aug. 30.

Butter requests from some restaurants are active, says DMN. “At this point, churners are focusing operational schedules on year-end holiday manufacturing needs. Butter processors indicated that cream availability was improving as the week advanced. Some buyers are finding spot loads of bulk butter hard to find as inventories are heavily committed.”

Western butter makers are “actively seeking cream to churn,” DMN said. “Cream has tightened as processors are eager to make print butter to meet holiday needs. Inventories continue to decrease due to the strong holiday demand.”

Cash Grade A nonfat dry milk finished the short week at 90 1/2-cents per pound, up a half-cent on the week and 17 1/4-cents above a year ago.